

## Selecting a Pottery Wheel

Selecting a pottery wheel is a pretty important task. Consider the following questions to help you determine what type of wheel to purchase.



### Determining What You Really Need

How proficient of a wheel thrower are you and how many pots do you intend to throw at one sitting? What size pots will you be throwing? These first three questions help to determine the horsepower of the wheel you require. Pottery wheel horsepower ranges anywhere from one eighth horsepower, to over two horsepower. The higher the horsepower, the more able the wheel is to withstand higher clay amounts on the wheel head.

Higher horsepower also allows the potter to throw a larger quantity of pots at one time. Please be aware that as the horsepower potential of the wheel increases, so does the price of the wheel. Why spend more money on a higher horsepower wheel, if only coffee mugs will be thrown? Don't depend on advertisements that claim, "this wheel will center "x" pounds of clay." It is important to research the wheel's horsepower rating.

### Manual or Motorized Wheels

One alternative to choosing wheel horsepower is to select a manually powered wheel. This type of wheel is called a kick wheel. Kick wheels have either a heavy cement stone that the potter kicks to obtain speed, or a treadle mechanism attached to the wheel head that the potter pushes with his foot to obtain speed. Manufacturers that sell kick wheels usually offer, as an option, an electric motor that can be fitted on the kick stone to be the power.

Kick wheels are usually cheaper than electric wheels. However, please consider your throwing proficiency. When providing your own power, you throw one more action into the scheme of throwing. While throwing pots, you have to remember to periodically kick the wheel. It's very similar to patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time.

### Special Requirements

Do you have any physical limitation that may inhibit your throwing ability? If a prospective potter has a bad back, he/she would be better off getting a wheel that doesn't put strain on the back. Most pottery wheel manufacturers sell extension legs for their wheels and offer them as optional equipment. The potter can then stand while throwing pots, relieving back tension.

### Space Limitations

What kind of space do you have available to house your pottery wheel and the additional equipment needed? A bare bones pottery studio requires a wheel, a chair (if the wheel is the sit-down type), a wedging table and shelves on which to put thrown pieces. There are various sizes of pottery wheels. They can vary from a kick wheel that requires about twice the space as an electric portable wheel, to a wheel that will attach onto the side of a tabletop. Some

have built-in tables to hold tools and a water bucket. Check pottery wheel dimensions when shopping.

### **Repairing Your Wheel**

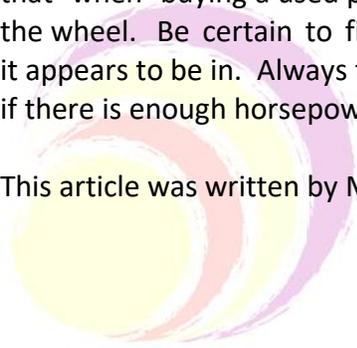
What pottery wheel repair support is in the area where you live? Pottery wheels are known for their long lives. However, when a pottery wheel malfunctions, who can you turn to for the repairs?

Check to see if there is anyone local who is proficient at repairing wheels. Does the manufacture offer a warranty, and how do you get repairs done? Ceramic suppliers usually have this information.

### **Purchase New or Used**

Will you ever sell the wheel you're using? Pottery wheels maintain their value extremely well, and there is a constant demand for used wheels in the ceramic world. Do you want to start with a brand-new wheel, or will a used wheel suffice? Wheels maintain their value but be aware that when buying a used pottery wheel, it is important to learn the individual history of the wheel. Be certain to find out how old it is, how much it was used, and what condition it appears to be in. Always throw the wheel, if possible, to see if the wheel is still in balance and if there is enough horsepower to fit your needs.

This article was written by Musette Young for Fired Arts Magazine.



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