

# POTTERY NOTES:

## 1. STAGES OF CLAY



From taking clay out of the bag to a finished item ready to use, clay goes through a process of making, drying and firing. Here's a description of the process and some of the terms you might come across.

**Wet clay:** Clay starts drying as soon as you open the bag (keep your clay covered if you are not using it!). Wet clay can be worked in many ways - thrown, rolled, molded etc. As it dries it will firm up. If you are working on your piece from week to week you will need to keep it wrapped in plastic otherwise it will dry too fast.

**Leather hard:** Let your work dry for a while and will become leatherhard. Your pot will still feel slightly cool to touch. At this stage the clay is firm enough to handle and trim and you can still add handles and spouts. From here on it will become difficult to modify the shape of your pot too much. If your work is fragile or has joins you might wish to cover your work, letting it dry slowly and evenly to avoid cracking. You can decorate your clay with slip or underglaze at this stage. You can also carve or burnish the surface.

**Bone dry:** Once fully dry your pot is fragile and difficult to modify or fix! Your pot will feel room temperature to touch. If you need to refine your work when it is bone dry, use a damp sponge and avoid scraping and sanding. You can decorate your pot with underglaze at this point.

**Greenware:** Pots that have not yet been fired at all are known as greenware.

The first firing is called a **BISQUE** firing.

**Bisque or Bisqueware:** After the first firing your pot is ceramic, it's porous but not yet super strong. Bisque firing is usually to around 1000°C. After bisque firing your pot is ideal for applying glaze. You can decorate a bisqued pot with underglaze or tissue transfers.

**Glazed ware:** After you have applied glaze to your pot, it's ready for its final firing.

The final firing is called the **GLAZE** firing.

There are different kinds of firings but it's likely your pot might be fired to either:

**Stoneware:** ~1280°C

After this firing your pot should be strong and waterproof. It should be dishwasher safe and microwave safe. If fired correctly the clay will be vitrified meaning it is no longer porous.

or

**Earthenware:** ~1120 °C

After this firing your pot will be decorative or useful for holding things... but might not be waterproof. This is because earthenware clay is not usually vitrified so it is still somewhat porous meaning water might seep from the vessel if there are any unglazed areas or cracks.

*Up to this point your clay can still be reclaimed.*

*Cover dry clay in a bucket and let it sit for a while. Drain off the water and let it dry out until it's soft and pliable. Then wedge your clay into a usable form.*