



The Complete Guide to Caring for Your Handmade Pottery

Timeless wisdom for treasured pieces

McCluskey Pottery
Limavady, Northern Ireland

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*"Pottery is the most ancient of arts, yet each piece begins its true life
the moment it enters your home."*

Welcome: The Living Art of Pottery

Your handmade pottery is more than a functional object – it's a piece of living art that will evolve with your life, gathering stories and developing character with each use.

When you bring home a piece of McCluskey pottery, you're welcoming something unique into your life. Unlike mass-produced ceramics, each handmade piece has its own personality, formed by the marriage of earth, water, fire, and human touch. This guide will help you understand and care for your pottery, ensuring it remains beautiful and functional for generations.

Understanding Your Handmade Pottery

Every piece of pottery from our studio is:

- **High-fired stoneware** - Fired to over 1280°C, making it incredibly durable
- **Lead-free and food safe** - All glazes are thoroughly tested
- **Unique** - Slight variations in colour and form are part of its character
- **Designed for daily use** - Not just for special occasions!

Potter's Wisdom: *The best way to honour your pottery is to use it. Daily use creates a patina of memory and adds to its beauty. Don't save it for "someday" – today is special enough.*

What Makes Handmade Different

Unlike factory ceramics, handmade pottery has soul. You might notice:

- Slight irregularities in shape (the potter's hand is visible)
- Glaze variations (where the fire kissed it differently)
- Minor colour differences between pieces (the alchemy of the kiln)
- Throwing rings on the inside (evidence of the wheel)

These aren't flaws – they're signatures of authenticity, proof that human hands shaped this piece specifically for you.

First Days: Welcoming Your Pottery Home

The relationship between you and your pottery begins with how you welcome it into your life.

The First Wash

Before first use, gently wash your pottery with warm water and mild soap. This removes any pottery dust and begins your care relationship. Use this time to:

- Feel the weight and balance in your hands
- Notice the glaze texture and colour variations
- Appreciate the base where you'll find the maker's mark
- Set your intention for how you'll use this piece

Temperature Acclimatisation

If your pottery has traveled to reach you, especially in extreme weather, let it adjust to room temperature for a few hours before washing. Ceramic can be sensitive to sudden temperature changes, though our high-fired stoneware is remarkably resilient.

Ancient Practice: Some potters recommend "seasoning" new pottery by rubbing the unglazed base with a cut lemon, then letting it dry. This traditional practice is said to strengthen the clay body.

Choosing Its Home

Where you store your pottery matters. Consider:

- **Accessibility** - Keep daily-use pieces within easy reach
- **Stability** - Ensure shelves are level and strong
- **Visibility** - Beautiful pottery deserves to be seen
- **Protection** - Away from high-traffic areas where it might be knocked

Daily Care: The Essentials

Caring for your pottery is simple – it's about consistency and gentleness rather than special treatments.

Washing Your Pottery

Hand Washing (Recommended)

While our pottery is dishwasher safe, hand washing will keep it looking its best for longer:

1. Use warm (not hot) water
2. Apply mild dish soap with a soft sponge or cloth
3. Pay attention to textured areas where food might lodge
4. Rinse thoroughly with warm water
5. Dry immediately with a soft towel, or air dry on a rack

Dishwasher Use

If using a dishwasher:

- Place pieces securely so they won't knock against each other
- Use a gentle cycle with mild detergent
- Avoid overcrowding
- Skip the heated dry cycle if possible

Avoid: Harsh detergents, steel wool, scouring pads, or abrasive cleaners. These can damage the glaze and leave permanent marks.

Using Your Pottery

Safe to Use	Special Considerations
✓ Microwave (for reheating)	Check for hot spots; heat distributes unevenly
✓ Oven (up to 200°C)	Place in cold oven, heat gradually
✓ Refrigerator	Cover food to prevent odour absorption

✓ Freezer

Leave room for food expansion

Deep Cleaning: Removing Stubborn Stains

Even with regular care, your pottery may develop stains or marks. Here's how to restore its beauty naturally.

Tea and Coffee Stains

These common stains are easily removed with this gentle method:

1. Make a paste with baking soda and water (3:1 ratio)
2. Apply to stained areas with a soft cloth
3. Let sit for 15-20 minutes
4. Gently rub in circular motions
5. Rinse thoroughly with warm water

Natural Alternative: A paste of salt and vinegar works wonderfully for tea stains and is completely food-safe.

Cutlery Marks

Those grey lines from cutlery are metal deposits on the glaze surface, not damage:

- **Bar Keeper's Friend** - A tiny amount on a damp cloth works miracles
- **Baking soda paste** - Gentler option, requires more elbow grease
- **Cream of tartar paste** - Mix with water, excellent for delicate glazes

Food Stains and Odours

Stain Type	Treatment
Tomato-based	Lemon juice + sunlight (place outside for 2-3 hours)
Grease	Hot water + dish soap, soak for 30 minutes
Wine	White vinegar soak, followed by baking soda scrub
Curry/Turmeric	Hydrogen peroxide + sunlight

For Persistent Odours

1. Fill pottery with warm water
2. Add 2 tablespoons baking soda
3. Let soak overnight
4. Wash normally in the morning

Storage: Protecting Your Collection

Proper storage ensures your pottery remains beautiful and accessible for daily use.

Stacking and Storing

Plates and Bowls

- Stack with felt pads, coffee filters, or paper towels between pieces
- Limit stacks to 6-8 pieces to prevent toppling
- Heavier pieces on bottom, lighter on top
- Ensure the stack is stable and centred

Mugs and Cups

- Store upright to protect handles
- Avoid hanging by handles (stress point)
- Group by size for efficient storage
- Leave space between pieces to prevent chipping

Space-Saving Tip: Plate racks aren't just for display – they're excellent for daily storage and prevent stacking damage.

Seasonal Storage

For pieces used seasonally:

1. Clean thoroughly and ensure completely dry
2. Wrap in acid-free tissue paper or bubble wrap
3. Store in a cool, dry place
4. Label boxes clearly with contents
5. Check periodically for any issues

Display Storage

When displaying pottery:

- Ensure shelves can support the weight
- Use museum wax for valuable pieces in earthquake-prone areas

- Keep out of direct sunlight to prevent glaze fading
- Maintain consistent temperature and humidity
- Dust regularly with a soft, dry cloth

Common Issues & Solutions

Understanding common pottery issues helps you address them calmly and effectively.

Crazing

Fine lines in the glaze that look like a spider web pattern:

- **What it is:** Glaze contracting more than clay body
- **Is it a problem?** Usually cosmetic only
- **Prevention:** Avoid extreme temperature changes
- **Living with it:** Many collectors prize crazed pieces for their character

Chips and Nicks

Important: Small chips on food surfaces should be smoothed with fine sandpaper to prevent bacterial growth. If extensively chipped, retire the piece from food use.

Options for chipped pieces:

- Continue using if chip is small and smooth
- Repurpose as a planter or decorative piece
- Practice kintsugi (Japanese gold repair) for special pieces
- Keep for sentimental value even if no longer functional

Discolouration

Type	Cause	Solution
Brown spots	Iron in clay/water	Usually permanent; adds character
White film	Hard water deposits	Vinegar soak, then normal wash
Dark patches	Oil absorption	Baking soda paste, may lighten over time

Thermal Shock

Preventing cracks from temperature changes:

- Never move pottery from freezer to oven directly
- Allow hot pottery to cool before washing
- Warm plates gradually in low oven
- Pour hot liquids slowly into room-temperature mugs

The Science Behind the Care

Understanding the 'why' behind care instructions helps you make informed decisions about your pottery.

Clay Memory

Pottery retains a "memory" of its making:

- **Throwing direction:** The spiral from wheel-throwing affects how pieces dry
- **Compression points:** Areas pressed during shaping are strongest
- **Glaze thickness:** Variations affect heat distribution
- **Firing temperature:** Determines porosity and strength

Why Temperature Matters

Pottery expands and contracts with temperature changes. The glaze and clay body expand at slightly different rates, which is why:

- Gradual temperature changes are safer than sudden ones
- Preheating plates prevents thermal shock
- Room temperature storage is ideal
- Consistent dishwasher placement reduces stress

Physics Fact: A mug can withstand the thermal shock of hot tea because the liquid pours in gradually, allowing the ceramic to adjust. The same mug might crack if plunged into boiling water.

Glaze Chemistry

Our glazes are formulated for:

Property	Benefit
High silica content	Durability and shine
Alkaline flux	Food safety
Iron oxide	Warm colour tones

Seasonal Care Considerations

Each season brings unique considerations for pottery care, especially in Ireland's varied climate.

Spring

- **Deep clean** stored pieces before use
- **Check** for winter storage damage
- **Transition** gradually from storage to use
- **Perfect time** to reorganise your collection

Summer

- **Outdoor use:** Bring pottery in during storms
- **Sun exposure:** Rotate displayed pieces to prevent uneven fading
- **Picnics:** Transport carefully in baskets with padding
- **Garden parties:** Designate outdoor-only pieces

Autumn

- **Temperature swings:** Be extra careful with thermal shock
- **Harvest season:** Acidic preserves can stain; seal jars properly
- **Prep for holidays:** Check and clean special occasion pieces

Winter

- **Heating:** Keep pottery away from radiators and fires
- **Cold surfaces:** Use trivets on cold counters
- **Holiday use:** Warm serving dishes gradually
- **Storage:** Ensure cupboards aren't too cold

*"In Ireland, we say pottery is like people – it prefers the middle path.
Not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry."*

When Pottery Tells Its Story

Over time, your pottery develops a patina – visual evidence of a life well-lived. Learning to read and appreciate these changes deepens your connection to each piece.

Reading the Signs

Glaze Evolution

Some glazes change subtly over time:

- **Matte glazes** may develop a subtle sheen from handling
- **Crystalline glazes** can shift in certain lights
- **Wood ash glazes** deepen and enrich with use
- **Copper glazes** may develop new colour notes

Use Patterns

Your pottery will show where it's been loved:

- Spoon rests in bowls
- Favourite mug handle wearing smooth
- Plate centres showing gentle wear
- Pour spots on pitcher spouts

Embrace the Journey: In Japan, the concept of 'wabi-sabi' celebrates imperfection and impermanence. Your pottery's changes are part of its beauty, not flaws to hide.

Memory Marks

Some marks tell stories worth preserving:

- The chip from your daughter's first attempt at washing up
- The tea stain from countless morning conversations
- The worn spot where your thumb naturally rests
- The glaze crackle that appeared during a memorable dinner party

These aren't damage – they're autobiography written in clay.

Emergency First Aid for Pottery

Quick action can save your pottery from permanent damage. Here's your emergency response guide.

Immediate Actions

Just Dropped It

1. **Don't move it** immediately - assess the damage
2. **Collect all pieces** - even tiny ones
3. **Photograph** the break pattern for repair reference
4. **Store pieces** safely in a box with tissue
5. **Decide:** Repair, repurpose, or release

Thermal Shock Crack

1. **Remove from heat** source immediately
2. **Let cool** completely before handling
3. **Don't use** for food if cracked through
4. **Consider:** Decorative use only

Staining in Progress

- **Wine/Coffee:** Rinse immediately with cold water
- **Oil/Grease:** Sprinkle with salt, let absorb
- **Tomato:** Don't let it sit - wash within minutes
- **Curry:** Sunlight is your friend - after washing

Never: Use superglue on pottery that will contact food. Food-safe ceramic adhesives exist for proper repairs.

Repair Options

Damage	DIY Option	Professional Option
Clean break	Food-safe ceramic adhesive	Professional restoration

Multiple pieces	Decorative kintsugi kit	Museum-quality repair
Missing chip	Polymer clay fill	Ceramic reconstruction
Handle broken	Repurpose as art	Handle replacement

Care by Pottery Type

Different pottery pieces have unique care needs based on their function and form.

Mugs & Cups

- **Daily rinse** prevents coffee/tea buildup
- **Handle with care** - literally, handles are stress points
- **Rotate use** to prevent uneven wear
- **Store upright** to protect handles

Plates & Platters

- **Stack carefully** with protection between
- **Support large platters** fully when lifting
- **Warm gradually** for hot foods
- **Avoid cutting** directly on surface

Bowls

- **Nest carefully** - don't force different sizes together
- **Soak after use** prevents food from hardening
- **Check rims** regularly for chips
- **Perfect for:** Everything from cereal to serving

Vases & Decorative Pieces

- **Change water** regularly to prevent mineral buildup
- **Clean monthly** even if not used
- **Use liners** for fresh flowers
- **Dust gently** with soft brush

Teapots

***Tea Lover's Secret:** Never soap a teapot interior! Rinse with hot water only. The tea oils season the pot and improve flavour over time.*

- **Dedicate** one pot per tea type if possible
- **Dry thoroughly** with lid off
- **Remove stains** with baking soda only
- **Warm before use** with hot water rinse

Baking Dishes

- **Grease well** before first use
- **Avoid broiler** - too intense
- **Cool completely** before washing
- **Soak stubborn food** - never scrape

Creating Your Care Ritual

Caring for pottery can become a mindful practice that enriches your daily life.

Morning Ritual

Start your day with intention:

1. Choose your mug mindfully - which one calls to you?
2. Warm it with hot water while your tea steeps
3. Notice its weight, texture, and warmth in your hands
4. After use, wash with gratitude for the day's beginning

Evening Practice

End your day with care:

1. Hand wash the day's pottery with warm water
2. Use this time to reflect on meals shared
3. Dry each piece thoroughly
4. Return pottery to its home with appreciation

Weekly Pottery Meditation

Mindful Practice: Once a week, choose one piece to clean thoroughly. Use this time to really see and appreciate it - notice new details, remember meals served, appreciate its continued service in your life.

Seasonal Pottery Celebration

Four times a year, celebrate your collection:

- **Spring:** Deep clean and reorganise
- **Summer:** Photograph your collection in natural light
- **Autumn:** Share a special meal using every piece
- **Winter:** Write stories about your favourite pieces

*"The pots we use every day are the autobiography of our lives,
written in clay and glaze, memory and meal."*

A Potter's Parting Wisdom

As you close this guide, remember that the best care comes from love and use, not perfection.

Your pottery was made to be part of your life. It was born in fire and will survive much more than you might think. Yes, care for it well - but don't let fear of damage prevent you from using and enjoying it fully.

Each piece in your collection has traveled from earth to wheel to kiln to reach your hands. It carries the story of its making, and now it will carry the story of your life too. The meal shared with friends, the quiet morning tea, the birthday cake served, the flowers displayed - these moments are what pottery lives for.

Remember

- Handmade pottery is stronger than it looks
- Character marks are evidence of a life well-lived
- The best care is regular, gentle attention
- When in doubt, choose the gentler option
- Your pottery wants to be used, not hidden away

Final Thought: *In a world of disposable goods, caring for handmade pottery is a radical act. It's choosing permanence over convenience, beauty over perfection, and connection over isolation.*

Thank You

Thank you for choosing handmade pottery and for taking the time to learn how to care for it. Your attention to these simple practices ensures that the pottery tradition continues, one cherished piece at a time.

May your pottery serve you well, bringing beauty and joy to ordinary moments, and may it outlive us all to tell the story of lives well-lived.

With warm wishes from the pottery wheel,

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