

Spraying Wood Ash Glazes

by Mark Issenberg

I started using ash glazes because I liked the idea of utilizing a material that many would consider waste: wood ash from a fireplace. My original ash glaze was derived from a slip glaze that Leon Kula gave me, which was 60 parts Redart clay and 40 parts whiting. Although this was a very simple glaze, I wanted to use some ash.

While living in Miami after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, there was an abundance of wood for fires on cool nights, so I now had a source of ash and made glazes using 50 parts Redart and 50 parts ash. After moving to Rising Fawn, Georgia, the wood changed from mahogany to mostly hickory and oak, plus pine, walnut and the occasional unknown dead tree. From experimenting with different types of trees, I discovered that the clay made more of a difference than the type of ash being used. Through this experimentation, I also learned to use sprayers for applying an ash glaze.

To begin, prepare ashes by running them through a flour sifter to remove unburned wood, charcoal and

big chunks of debris, then run the dry ash through a 40-mesh screen. I usually process a 5-gallon bucket of ash at one time. Caution: Wood ash is caustic, so work only in a well-ventilated area wearing a respirator, safety goggles and chemical-resistant gloves for protection.

The next step is to weigh equal amounts of ash and Redart clay. I only mix up what I'll use in one firing (1000 grams of each) since the ash glaze does not store well. After mixing with water, run the glaze through a 40-mesh screen then through an 80-mesh screen to get it to the right consistency for spraying. Use a thinner glaze than you would for dipping or pouring.

Due to space limitations, I spray outside, but if you spray inside, you'll need a spray booth with proper ventilation. I use a portable sprayer and set the compressor at 40 psi. I use a really heavy turntable that



This vase shows how ash glazes run when applied thicker toward the top of a piece. If applied too thick near the base, ash glazes may run onto your kiln shelves.



1

A variety of spray guns and airbrushes are available. I typically use a variety of sprayers with different capabilities—some fill in big areas and others do thin lines.



2

Start at the top and work your way down, then return to the top area again to build up glaze. Apply a thicker coat of glaze only at the top because ash glazes run.

CAUTION

Always wear a respirator and eye protection when spraying glazes! Even outdoors!



3

Using a small airbrush sprayer allows you to do small bands and detail work. Note that the piece is sitting on top of an empty cat food can.

Recipes

Blue Ash

Cone 10

Ash	50.0 %
Plastic Vitrox (PV Clay)	50.0
	<u>100.0 %</u>
Add: Cobalt Carbonate	2.0 %

Light Green Ash

Cone 10

Ash	50.0 %
Plastic Vitrox (PV Clay)	50.0
	<u>100.0 %</u>
Add: Copper Carbonate	3.0 %

Angel Eyes

Cone 10

Whiting	20.0 %
Custer Feldspar	40.0
EPK Kaolin	10.0
Silica	30.0
	<u>100.0 %</u>
Add: Red Iron Oxide	4.0 %
Rutile	4.5 %

This glaze is originally from Jack Troy and does not run.

Oatmeal

Cone 10

Dolomite	20.7 %
Whiting	4.3
Custer Feldspar	53.3
EPK Kaolin	21.7
	<u>100.0 %</u>
Add: Zircopax	8.7 %
Tin Oxide	4.3 %
Yellow Ochre	2.2 %

Though not an ash glaze, this glaze does not run but works well when used in combination.

turns easily partly because I spray the shaft with lubricant each time I start the glazing process. You'll also need a gallon bucket with a small sponge for cleaning areas where you don't want glaze, and a towel to keep your hands dry.

With all bisqueware prepared and four to five sprayers ready to go, you can begin the glazing process. Start turning the turntable just before you start spraying. With bowls and platters, start with the bottom and glaze the footring first, then the outside body. Work with the spray gun about 5–12 inches from the surface and use steady even strokes to avoid getting excess glaze in any one spot where it can drip. Use a sponge to clean the footring. I don't use wax on bowls because the glaze builds up and runs off the wax, but I do wax flat bottoms. I then flip the bowl and spray the inside using a couple of different glazes. When fired, ash glazes run but some of the other glazes don't run at all. Testing determines how certain combinations will behave.

One of the most important steps to spraying is cleaning up the sprayers after use. Run lots of water through the parts of the sprayers, then set them on a metal rack to drip dry. Also drain the water out of the air compressor before storing it.