

How to choose a Chimenea

What options do I have?

You have three basic types of chimenea to choose from - a fire clay chimenea, a cast iron chimenea, or a steel and cast iron chimenea. Although designed for a similar purpose, the three types are made from different materials and have different performance characteristics.

Why are there three types?

The clay chimenea was originally developed in Mexico and is derived from stone fireplaces used for heating and cooking. Cast iron models are a more recent development and are based on the design of wood burning stoves. Steel chimeneas are the latest development and based on Mexican designs, but are made in steel and cast iron.

Do they come in different sizes?

All three types are available in several different sizes, from very small to very large, the weight, cost and heat output increasing not unsurprisingly with size. The larger models burn more fuel and will heat a larger just area. If you have a large patio then a larger chimenea will warm a larger area. For a really large patio then consider two chimeneas, one at either end.

Do they need assembling?

Clay chimeneas need no assembling, they come finished and ready to use. Place the stand on your patio, lift the chimenea carefully into position, and place sand or lava stones in the bottom and bingo! It's ready. More assembling is necessary for cast iron and steel chimeneas, which are supplied as components in a carton and must be assembled.

We have young children and pets at home, which is the safest?

Chimeneas are safe provided you follow the operating instructions and apply common sense. They are real fires and will burn if touched when lit. If you have young children and pets then buy a chimenea guard which will keep curious fingers and noses away from the hot surface. The surface of a clay chimenea is unlikely to ever become so hot it will give a serious burn, unlike the surface of a cast iron or steel model which can become very hot when fired.

Which one gives out the most heat?

The heat output depends on the size of the chimenea and the amount of fuel burned. Fundamentally the heat out = the fuel in, simply more fuel more heat. From a performance point of view Mexican fire clay models have the best combustion characteristics and will burn fuel to fine ash.

Do they all burn the same fuel?

Use only dry wood as fuel on a Mexican fire clay chimenea, do not use charcoal or coal both of which burn very hot and might damage the chimenea. This is why you should always put 50mm of sand or lava stone to protect the bottom of a clay chimeneas from direct heat.

Cast iron and steel chimeneas will burn wood, charcoal and coal, but remember if the chimenea becomes very hot then the paint will burn off. Stove paint is heat resistant up 600 degrees C, but it is not fire proof – fire proof paint does not exist. If the paint burns off, the surface will rust.

Which needs the most maintenance?

For all three types little maintenance is required apart from removing ash and occasional repainting if the surface paint is damaged or burnt. Clay chimeneas can be repainted with ordinary emulsion paint and cast iron or steel with heat resisting stove paint. Clay chimeneas require the least maintenance.

Which type of chimenea can I leave outside all year round?

The short answer is protect all chimeneas from the UK weather - we recommend you buy a cover for all three type of chimeneas. Cast iron or steel will rust very quickly if left outside and clay will become waterlogged if left in the rain because there are no drainage holes. Similarly your chimenea will last longer if you bring it in for the winter. Never use a waterlogged clay chimenea, wait until it is completely dry.

Which type chimenea is easier to lift?

Medium sized clay and cast iron chimeneas weigh upwards of 35 kgs, and larger models upwards of 50 kgs. Chimeneas have an awkward shape and are too heavy for a comfortable lift! Steel chimeneas weigh half as much, about 15 kgs and are especially suitable for anyone who finds lifting is a problem.

Which type of chimenea will last the longest?

The short answer is the cast iron model. The long answer is product life depends on how a chimenea is treated or mistreated and maintained.

Which type is best for cooking?

Modern chimeneas are primarily designed for space heating, although there are removable bbq grills available for the fire clay types and swing out bbq grills for the cast iron and steel. We suggest a chimenea is at best used for occasional barbecuing, for the serious outdoor chef nothing is better than a proper bbq.