

What is an Air Cannon?

Basically an [air cannon](#), or potato cannon, is a home made device that will launch a potato or any other projectile literally hundreds of yards. These devices are usually built from scratch, most often with PVC pipe. The potato is forced into a pipe, and then propelled out with a firing mechanism. The firing mechanism usually falls into one of three categories.

Pneumatic Guns

Basically these [air cannons are powered by compressed air](#). These are my favorite. They are filled with either a pump or a compressed air tank, and fired by the sudden release of the air. These are quieter than the others, and are legal in some areas where the others are not. They can be more difficult to build, since they have to hold the air pressure before firing.

Combustion Guns

These use a combustible gas in a chamber, often propane or an aerosol like hair spray, which is ignited with a spark. These don't need the larger reservoir of the compressed air, so can tend to be a little smaller. These are not only messy, temperamental and dangerous, but can cause a fire when you launch a burning tennis ball or other flammable object into the trees or nearby field.

Hybrid Air Cannons

These use a compressed fuel air mixture, so actually combine elements of the other two types. As you may imagine, these are much more powerful, and so are also the most dangerous of the three types.

Are Air Cannons Legal?

The laws on air cannons vary greatly around the world or even around the United States. In many areas they are completely legal. In some areas, only the types which use combustion are outlawed. If you are thinking about buying or building one of these you would be best served by checking with your local authorities on the legality of them in your area. There is an entry on Wikipedia that outlines some areas that have outlawed [air cannons](#), but it may not be completely up to date.

Air Cannons for Kids

There are a few small air cannons that shoot small pieces of potatoes that are designed to be toys for small children, even as young as five years old. These are sold in toy stores and online, are powered by compressing air with the gun grip and are much safer than the home made pyrotechnic projects.

Even if you don't plan to build one, it's fascinating to watch videos of how to build an air cannon and the results of the testing [videos of air cannons being fired](#). To watch a video on how to build your own air cannon, check out <http://www.youtube.com/user/webgraffix#p/a/u/2/zKE63jZmrh4> or visit www.AmericanAirCannons.com