

Should I install a combination (combi) boiler?

The first thing we need to do to answer that question is to ascertain what system you currently have.

Heat only or conventional boilers: These types of boilers can be wall or floor mounted and can also be installed behind your fire known as a back boiler. The system will usually include an open vented hot water tank in the airing cupboard and two water storage tanks in the loft known as feed and expansion tanks. This type of system and back boilers in particular were fitted in thousands of homes across the UK during the 80s and early 90s. If you have this type of system it may be time to look at updating it. The main consideration when choosing your boiler type is the hot water your house will require. If you have 1 bathroom then a combination or combi boiler is usually the best choice.

System boilers: This type of system operates in a similar principle to the heat only boiler but instead of using feed and expansion tanks in the loft it incorporates an expansion vessel and the boiler is pressurized directly from the cold mains using a filling loop. System boilers would usually incorporate an unvented hot water cylinder capable of producing much larger amounts of hot water than open vented systems. If you have more than 2 bathrooms in your property this would be the correct system to choose.

Combination (combi) boilers: This type of system has no tanks at all, the hot water is heated in the boiler when the hot tap is opened. Combi boilers have advanced massively in the past 10 years or so and there are some high hot water output combi boilers now on the market i.e Vaillant Ecotec 937 which is capable of producing 20ltr of hot water per minute. Please keep in mind, a combi boiler's hot water supply is fed directly from the cold main, if your cold mains is delivering 9ltr per minute and you fit a combi boiler capable of producing 12ltr of hot water you will only achieve 9ltr.

Condensing boiler? The vast majority of domestic boilers are now condensing boilers. All three boilers, combinations, heat only and system are all available as condensing boilers. The term condensing boiler comes from the cool water returning to the boiler entering the heat exchanger and causing condensation due to the hot heat exchanger and cool return water. That condensation is directed safely to a drain. Condensing boilers became compulsory in 2005 as an effort to improve heating efficiency.

Overall if you don't have a huge hot water requirement i.e 1 bathroom and an ensuite or less then a combination boiler is going to be the most efficient and economical option. The other benefit of a combi boiler is space. A combi boiler does not require tanks or hot water cylinders often freeing up valuable storage space in airing cupboards.