

DIY: Refilling Your Cooking Gas Bottles in French Polynesia

Located: <http://www.jacarandajourney.com/other-good-stuff>

Before reaching French Polynesia we had been using propane or butane in our North American cooking gas aluminum bottles depending on our location. In French Polynesia we found that a special fitting was required in order to refill our NA bottles and almost all the cooking gas is butane. (although it is possible to find propane in Papeete ,Tahiti).

While there are a few places that will fill your cooking gas bottles in FP, more often you are in remote areas where you will not be able to find someone to do it for you. In addition, it's considerably cheaper if you do it yourself. We have been using the step by step methods described below for filling our own bottles with butane for more than 3 ½ years here in FP with no issues.

The fittings on North American (NA) bottles and other countries bottles are different than the French Polynesian (FP) bottles so you will need to buy a fitting. We did NOT have to change our regulator in order to switch from using propane to butane.

I describe two ways of filling: the Slow (24 hours) and the Fast (20 -75 minutes) Method.

What you'll Need

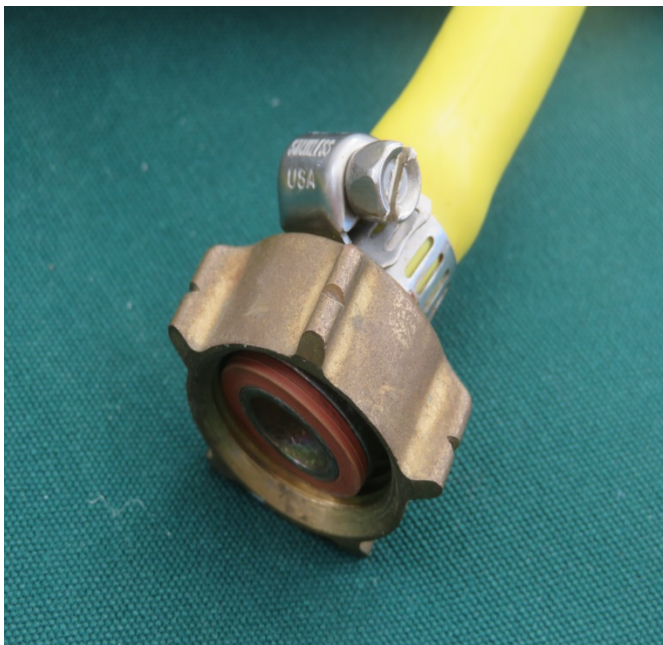
The following picture shows you everything you will need to perform a transfer from the FP butane bottle to your ship's cooking gas bottle.



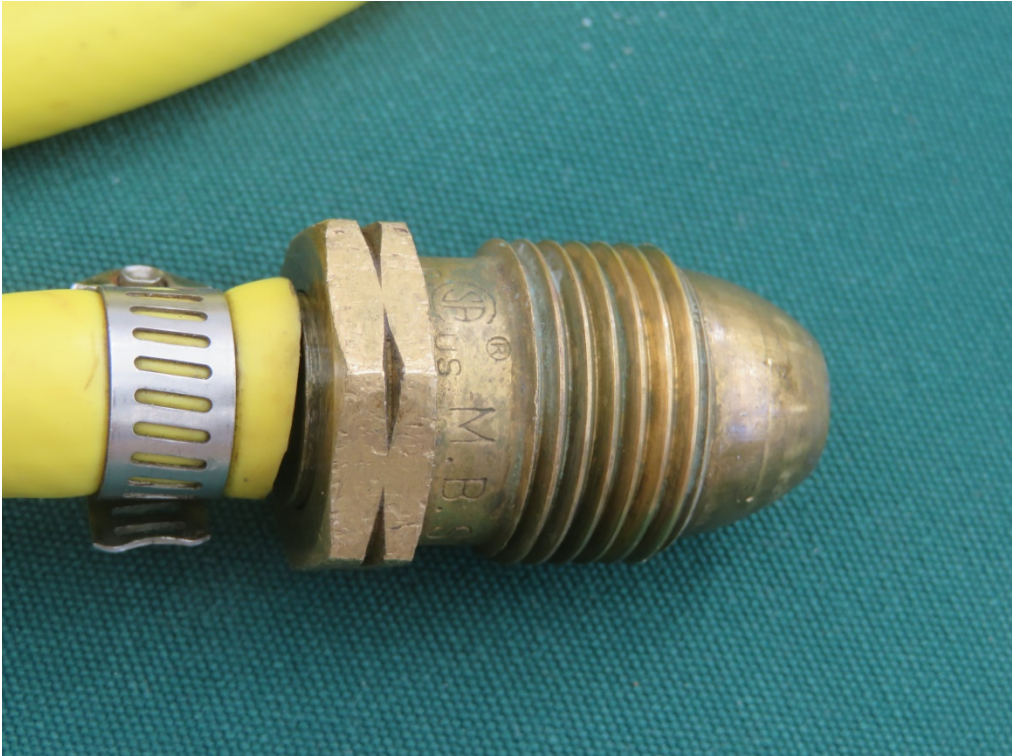
Left to Right

1. Screwdriver to open/close bleed screw
2. Adjustable wrench to tighten/loosen North American male stub
3. Travel scale to determine state of fill by weight
4. 8'-10' length of propane hose with US fitting on one end and a French fitting on the other. It is best to have this hose and US fitting assembled before you depart from North America. You will not find the US propane fitting in FP as far as I know. We bought ours at Downwind Marine in San Diego.
5. Length of rope for hoisting the FP gas bottle in a tree, etc.

When you arrive in FP go to the nearest hardware store and buy a hose barb for FP tank fitting (see photo below). The only place we could find it in the Marquesas to purchase it was in Nuku Hiva. Nuku Hiva Yacht Services purchased it for us at the local hardware store in Taiohae and we had a cruiser deliver it to us in Hiva Oa. Not sure if it is available in the Gambiers.



Hose barb for FP tank fitting



North American Propane fitting sourced outside FP. Hose barb to propane male fitting. The fitting on your tank maybe different. Downwind Marine in San Diego carries these.

Most of the gas stations & small grocery stores sell cooking gas and you will see storage areas like the picture below. You will want the shorter container that is on the right hand side of the photo. The cost is fixed and is 2850 cpf (\$28 US). Plus you pay another 3000 cpf for a refundable tank deposit. You will have enough to completely fill a 20 lb NA tank and should even have a small amount to top off your BBQ tank.



Where to fill your tank

Find a place where you can hang the FP tank away from people. I usually do this on land and hoist the tank upside down in a tree and put our bottle below it on the ground. On the day of these photos, my favorite tree was being used for shade by women selling fruit so I used the dock instead. I have also transferred gas back on the boat by hanging the full bottle on an outboard engine davit and placing the empty bottle in the dinghy below it. It is best to put the FP bottle in the sun so it gets hot. If you use the fast method (see below) you must be sure it's out in the open (best with a breeze).

Two methods to fill your own tank

1. Fast Method: (20-90 minutes) Connect the two tanks and open the bleed screw on your tank.
2. Slow Method: Connect the two tanks, open both valves and leave the bleed screw closed. Leave hang overnight. Usually takes 12-16 hours to transfer the butane.

Directions to transfer by Fast Method: (photos below)

Warning: Butane/Propane can inflict frostbite so eye protection and gloves are recommended.

1. Pick an open area outside for transferring cooking gas.
2. Choose a tree with a solid branch at least 8' above ground
3. Invert the FP Tank and hoist at least 5' above your tank
4. Connect the hose fitting to the FP tank(counter clockwise).
5. Connect the hose fitting to your tank.
6. Fully open the valve on the FP tank.
7. Slightly loosen the hose fitting on your tank to allow a small amount of gas to flow out then re-tighten. This will bleed the air out of the hose.
8. Fully open the valve for your tank.
9. Open the bleed screw 1-1 1/2 turns. You will hear a hiss as air/gas is released from your tank. (See next photo for location of bleed screw)
10. Wait for the liquid gas to flow out the bleed screw.
11. I will occasionally measure the tank using the digital travel scale. Based on weight it will give you an indication of how full it is. Our tank is full at 34-35lbs
12. Close the bleed screw.
13. Close your tanks main valve.
14. Close the FP tank.
15. Carefully open your tank fitting using the adjustable wrench to bleed the gas that is still in the hose out.
16. Remove the hose from both tanks.
17. Return the FP tank to the service station and get your deposit returned.



This fuel dock was very quiet and there were no customers until I had finished.



Full butane tank on the dock above the dinghy with our empty bottle.



***Location of the bleed screw.** Don't be alarmed when opened air will be coming out of the bleed port (In my case located near the knob). It will smell like cooking gas but is just air tainted with butane smell. This air will become white vapor when the tank is full.*



Here I am using the scale to check the amount of gas in the bottle.