

Burning Firewood Recommendations

I have noticed over the last month many trucks and trailers loaded with firewood. This is understandable. It is getting cold and energy costs are still relatively high. Because of this, I decided to perform some research about firewood. One thing I found somewhat interesting is that the amount of heat produced per cord is available for many tree species. In general, hardwoods (deciduous trees) produce more heat than softwoods (conifers). However, this is not the only factor to take into account when purchasing firewood. Other things to consider include how long wood has been cured (how long wood has dried), how much smoke is produced, tendency to produce sparks and ease of splitting.

As a general rule wood should be dried for a full year before it is burned. If you are going to purchase wood, find a reliable vendor to be sure you are getting a quality product. Burning wet wood produces less heat because water must evaporate before the wood burns and “dirty smoke” is produced by burning wet wood that causes creosote buildup. This can lead to chimney fires.

Additionally, resin content of wood impacts the amount of smoke produced and also the amount of sparks. In general, hardwoods contain fewer resins and produce less smoke and sparks. Of wood available locally, Gamble’s oak (scrub oak) and bigtooth maple produce the least amount of smoke and burn the hottest.

If you are planning on cutting and splitting your own wood, how amenable wood is to splitting should be considered. Interestingly, this is less related to whether you are working with a hardwood or softwood but rather the particular species. Some of the densest woods are relatively easy to split while other softer woods are more difficult.

There are multiple sources of firewood. Permits can often be obtained to cut your own. Many vendors deliver for a reasonable price. With this, expect to usually pay around 50% more for hardwoods than softwoods. Landfills often allow cutting from trees that have been left at their green waste facilities. Many homeowners advertise free firewood through local listings from trees they have felled, if you are willing to cut it. Construction waste (usually softwood) is fine to burn as long as it has not treated or painted. Many arborists, wood working and pallet companies offer wood for burning inexpensively. In fact, arborists can be a source of more difficult to come by hardwood due to the number of shade trees they remove.

When using firewood, safety is always paramount. Chimneys should be swept and inspected at least annually, avoid burning wet wood, and have sufficient carbon monoxide/smoke detectors. With these precautions, wood heat offers a viable and often less expensive source of heat. For more specific information about firewood access the following factsheet entitled: Heating with Wood: Species Characteristics and Volumes. It can be accessed at http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/HomeTown/General_HeatingWithWood.htm.

Registration for the Master Gardener classes has also begun. Obtain more information and an application at: <http://www.extension.usu.edu/cache/horticulture>. You can also call 435-752-6263 for information.