

Firewood: Where do I get it, and where do I store it?

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If you haven't followed your father's and grandfather's advice about getting your firewood in May so it will be ready to burn by October, and you are lucky enough to get what is purported to be seasoned wood, or you have to settle for green wood, you are about to embark on a winter of discontent with your wood burning appliance.

Dry wood - wood that registers only five to ten percent moisture when stuck with a moisture meter - yields about 8200 BTU's per pound. One pound of dry basswood yields the same number of BTU's as a pound of dry sugar (rock or hard) maple. The difference is in the size of the one pound pieces. The piece of basswood could be as much as twice the size of the piece of sugar maple. The point is, when shopping for hardwood firewood, you want the densest hard woods like sugar maple, beech, yellow birch, and red oak. If you could get a load of hickory, locust or hophornbeam, you would really be in wood burner heaven as those species of hardwood yield up to 27 million BTU's per cord.

If you can't find a person who has firewood for sale, ask your wood burning neighbor where he or she got their wood. If you call about an ad in a newspaper, take the time to go and look at the wood. Ask how much will be in the load that you will get. Is it a full 128 cubic feet after you pile it up or could it be less due to the loss in cutting and splitting the tree length stems? The more advice you get and the more time you spend checking things out before that pile lands in your driveway, the happier you will be with you purchase. Each delivery should have a delivery ticket giving the name and address of the producer, the quantity that was delivered (for example, a medium sized dump truck with high wire sides holds two loose or thrown cords), the quantity upon which the price is based (for example, \$230 per cord) and the identity of the wood in the load in the most descriptive terms, including any quality or dryness of the wood delivered. If, after piling up the load, you feel that you did not get what you were told you would get, contact Hal Prince in the Department of Agriculture's Weights and Measures Division (now known as Quality Assurance and Regulation) and ask for guidance. Telephone 287-3841.

Once you get your wood, if it is dry or seasoned, get it off the ground and onto pavement or pallets to keep the pieces on the bottom from getting wet. If possible pile it in a place where the sun can shine on it and the wind can blow through the pile. A waterproof roof also will help keep the wood dry if the pile has to be stored outside.

Drying is a function of time, temperature and turbulence (the wind through the pile) until the average outside temperature stays below 40 degrees. Until that time, the pile, if stacked so that the wind and sun can get to it, will dry considerably depending on the species and the moisture content when you received it.

Trees actively growing contain as much as 50 percent moisture. You want to get rid of at least 30 percent of that moisture before you throw it in the stove or you will waste precious heating BTU's drying out the green wood enough so that it will burn.

A good test of dryness is the lack of steam and accompanying brownish foam coming out of the end of a stick of wood that has been on a briskly burning fire for ten minutes.

And speaking of burning, do not forget to have your stove and its installation checked by the local fire department. Replace smoke pipe as necessary, and if you do have to burn high moisture content wood, plan on having your chimney swept several times during the heating season.

When you take the ashes out of the stove, have a metal bucket with a tight cover and when it has the ashes in it, immediately take it outside and place it when nothing can tip it over. In about a week when the ashes may have cooled, spread them on the garden (a ton of wood ash is equivalent to 866 pounds of lime) at night and watch to see if there are still embers glowing in the wind - proof enough that ashes stay hot a long time.

Once you get the hang of heating with wood, it can be a rewarding experience, especially when the power goes out.