

Firewood Basics
By Wendy Scribner
UNH Cooperative Extension

As fuel costs rise, many people turn to firewood to augment other heating sources and reduce their energy costs. NH is blessed with an abundance of trees well suited for use as firewood.

For cost comparisons, a rule of thumb is that one cord of dry hardwood is equivalent to about 150 gallons of heating oil in terms of the heat produced. Currently, firewood prices are averaging \$250 to \$300 a cord.

Not all trees are created equal when it comes to the amount of heat they generate when burned. Common tree species that provide a high heat value per cord include oak, sugar maple, beech, yellow birch and ash. Those that offer the lowest heat value per cord include poplar, white and gray birch, and pine. Dense hardwoods such as oak, sugar maple, white ash or apple can yield 40 % more energy than lighter woods such as poplar or basswood.

Moisture content of wood plays an important role in its use as a fuel. It's important to burn only wood that has been cut, split and seasoned for at least 6 months. Ideally, a year is required for freshly cut and split firewood to drop from 80% moisture content to 20 %. Burning "green" wood is inefficient because up to 15% of the energy generated will be used to evaporate off the water in the wood and will not be available as heat to you.

Burning green wood generates less heat value for you and can also lead to an increased build up of creosote in your chimney. Creosote deposits are a major cause of chimney fires since the sticky deposits are extremely flammable at high temperatures.

Although firewood is often sold as dry or seasoned, these terms have no legal definition in New Hampshire. Seasoned wood will often have cracks in the ends and may be grayish in color. Bark can be easily pulled away from the seasoned wood, and seasoned wood will weigh significantly less than green wood.

Firewood is sold by "cords". A cord equals 128 cubic feet and is often measured as a stack of wood 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 4 feet high. Firewood should only be sold by the cord or by fractions of a cord.

When you buy firewood be sure to get a receipt showing the seller's name, address and phone number; the price paid per cord; the amount of wood received; the condition of the wood (seasoned or green); and the species of wood included in your purchase.

If you own your own woodlot, cutting your own firewood provides a great opportunity to thin out your forest and improve the health and vigor of the trees remaining. Many of our forests contain a surplus of trees all competing for sunlight and nutrients. When you choose trees to cut for firewood, focus on removing the crooked and poorly formed trees.

Many of the trees that have the greatest heat value as firewood are also valuable timber species. Large, straight, healthy trees should be left to grow and increase in value as they are more valuable as lumber than as firewood. Removing poor quality trees for firewood will improve the growth of your remaining better quality trees. Openings created by cutting trees for firewood can also enhance your land's value as wildlife habitat. For advice on how to manage your property and choose trees to cut for firewood call UNH Cooperative Extension at 447-3834.

Wendy Scribner is an Extension Educator in Forest Resources with UNH Cooperative Extension in Carroll County. She can be reached at wendy.scribner@unh.edu or (603) 447-3834.

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