



Hot Tips for Burning Wood During a Cold Winter

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With cold weather upon us and heating prices on the rise, many Connecticut residents are looking into wood as a potential heat source, whether it be cranking up the woodstove that's already installed but idle or purchasing a new one or just making a cozy fire in the fireplace on the weekends. Regardless of what option one is looking into, they require obtaining and storing firewood.

Unless one is just buying a few bags, boxes, or bundles for that occasional fireplace or firepit fire, firewood is typically purchased in cords. A cord of wood is 8 feet long by 4 feet wide and 4 feet high or 128 cubic feet. Looking at the internet, prices for a cord in CT seem to be around \$300 but vary by type of wood, how seasoned it is, and location.

Hardwoods burn hotter, longer and while usually more expensive, they are the best choice for heating. They include tree species such as oak, maple, hickory, ash, cherry, and apple. Typically, hardwoods are deciduous trees. Softwoods are primarily conifers including pine, spruce, cedar but also deciduous species like poplar. Softwoods burn faster and maybe messier to handle as the conifers exude sap.

Purchase wood that has been seasoned (cut and allowed to dry) for at least a year. Fresh cut or green wood contains a great deal of moisture and will burn poorly producing less heat and more smoke. If purchased, plan on allowing it to dry for use next winter.

Firewood can be sold cut and split or in larger lengths if you feel up to the task. It may be advertised as kiln-dried or heat-treated. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably but they do have different meanings. If wood is kiln-dried, it has been exposed to heat, but the primary purpose is to make a low moisture content product. Heat treated, on the other hand, means the wood was brought up to a high enough temperature to disinfect or kill any pest and a certificate from a qualified entity is provided.



It is really important for Connecticut residents to purchase wood from local sources unless it is certified heat treated. This is because moving firewood can also move insect pests or even diseases that could cause significant damage to our natural and agricultural resources. There are 3 main insect pests that are easily moved with firewood and are of concern in this state.

The emerald ash borer (EAB) was found in New Haven county in 2011 but has spread to other counties. This tiny, shiny green beetle, native to Asia, feeds exclusively on ash trees and now has been found throughout the state. The major way this highly destructive species spreads is by the movement of ash tree firewood. Once an ash tree is infected, it typically is dead in 3 to 5 years.

The Asian long-horned beetle has caused significant damage in neighboring states but to my knowledge has not been found in Connecticut yet. This large black insect with white spots and a black and white segmented antennae is one to be on the watch for. Like the EAB, the trees infested by this insect weaken and die. Adults lay eggs that hatch and larvae burrow into tree where they feed, causing much damage internally to the tree, eventually emerge, mate, lay eggs and the cycle repeats itself.

The most recent pest of note that can be transported not only on firewood but on almost any solid object, including campers and cars is the spotted lantern fly. This creature feeds on a variety of natural, ornamental, and agricultural plants and has been confirmed in Fairfield and New Haven counties with single specimen reports in other counties. Egg masses can be found on any hard surface so inspect any outdoor object being moved into the state.

Moved firewood really is a major pathway for these and other pests to make their way into our forests. There are not enough regulators to enforce the state regulations that say that unless firewood is certified heat-treated and has the accompanied paperwork, it is prohibited to move firewood into or within Connecticut if it comes from areas under federal or state quarantine. So, it is up to all of us who burn firewood to make sure we purchase it from a reliable source that will share where the firewood was harvested and whether seasoned, kiln-dried or heat treated.

Once you have your firewood, be sure to stack it away from the house in a way that air can circulate to promote drying. Elevate the pile so the bottom wood is off the ground to lessen problems with moisture and pests. Cover the top of pile so wood won't be exposed to rain or snow. Do not bring firewood inside until a day or two before use as any creatures, like beetles in non heat-treated wood, may be aroused and try to join your household.

Always put safety first. Whether burning wood or using more conventional heating methods, always have the chimney or furnace serviced in late summer or fall, make sure you have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and place fire extinguishers on each floor of your home. Never burn pressure treated, painted or stained, or engineered sheet goods such as plywood. Toxic fumes may enter the house or be released in chimney emissions.

For questions on gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.