



Guide to Wood

It is better to buy wood by volume than by weight because between 35% and 60% of the weight of freshly felled wood comes from water.

Seasoning reduces moisture content of the wood. Wood felled during one winter should be seasoned until the next and preferably a second winter before it is burned. Trees felled during the Spring/Summer will have a very high moisture content to those felled in late Autumn/ Winter, therefore whilst a log first cut in January may be ready To Burn within a year, it is necessary for a log cut in May to be seasoned for at least two years.

During seasoning logs should be stored under a cover in an airy place.

Wood should be burned when the moisture content is below 25% - "air-dry". You can tell a log is dry because the bark will come away easily in the hand and the log will have splits across the grain. Ideally logs purchased should be no more than 10cm thick. Any that are will need to be split again to ensure they burn properly.

Heat and Warmth in Harmony With Nature

Over the course of it's long life, with the help of sunlight, a tree builds up a wood substance of minerals, water and carbon dioxide. It stores solar energy naturally, thereby producing the oxygen that is vital to our lives. When the wood is burned, it releases only the amount of carbon dioxide that the tree accumulated during its life time. This means that heating with wood does not contribute to the greenhouse effect.

Which Wood to Burn?

Some of the best woods to burn are Ash, Beech, Hawthorn, Apple and Wild Cherry. Below is a table for ease of identification and showing individual characteristics of each wood.

The quality of the following firewood is based upon various characteristics such as the speed of burn, heat given off, tendency to spark and spit, ease of splitting, time to season etc.

Grade 1 Poor

Grade 2 Low

Grade 3 Good

Grade 4 High

Common Name	Botanical Name	Comments	Grade
Alder	Alnus	A low Quality firewood	1
Apple	Malus	Needs to be seasoned well. Burns Well with a pleasant smell.	3
Ash	Fraxinus	Considered to be one of the best woods for firewood. Low water content and can be split easily with an axe. It can be burned green but like all wood is best seasoned. Burns at a steady rate and not too fast.	4
Beech	Fagus	Has a high water content so only burns well when well seasoned	3
Birch	Betula	An excellent firewood and will burn unseasoned. However it does burn fast so best mixed with slower burning wood such as Elm or Oak.	3-4
Cedar	Cedrus	A good firewood which burns well with a pleasant smell. Gives a good lasting heat. Doesn't spit too much and small pieces can be burnt unseasoned.	2
Cherry	Prunus	Needs to be seasoned well. Burns well with a pleasant smell without spitting.	2-3
Elm	Ulmus	A good firewood but due to high water content (140% - more water than wood) it must be seasoned well. It may need assistance from another faster burning wood such as Birch to keep it burning well. However it gives off a good lasting heat and burns very slowly. Difficult to split.	2-3
Eucalyptus	Eucalyptus	Allow to season well since wood is very wet (sappy) when fresh. Can be difficult to split due to stringy wood fibre. Best method is to slice into rings and allow to season during the summer. The rings will start to split themselves. Burns fast with a pleasant smell without spitting.	2-3
Hawthorn	Crataegus	Good Firewood, burns well.	3-4
Hazel	Corylus	Excellent firewood. Allow to season. Burns fast without spitting.	4
Holly	Ilex	Can be burnt Green A good firewood	3
Hornbeam	Carpinus	Good firewood burns well.	3
Horse Chestnut	Aesculus	A low quality firewood.	2
Larch	Larix	Needs to be seasoned well. Spits excessively while it burns and forms an oily soot within chimneys.	1
Lime	Tilia	A low quality firewood.	2
Oak	Quercus	One of the best firewood's. When seasoned well it gives off a good lasting heat. Burns reasonably slowly.	4
Pear	Pyrus	Needs to be seasoned well. Burns well with a pleasant smell and without spitting.	3
Pine	Pinus	Needs to be seasoned well. Spits while it burns and forms an oily soot within chimneys.	1
Plane	Platanus	A usable firewood.	3
Poplar	Populus	Considered a poor firewood.	1
Rowan	Sorbus Aucuparia	Good firewood. Burns well.	3
Spruce	Picea	A low quality firewood.	2
Sweet Chestnut	Castanea	Burns when seasoned but spits continuously and excessively. Not for use on an open fire.	1-2
Sycamore (Maples)	Acer Pseudoplatanus	Good Firewood. Burns well	3
Walnut	Juglans	A low quality firewood.	2
Wellingtonia	Sequoiadendron	Poor for use as a firewood	1
Willow	Salix	Has a high water content. Needs to be well seasoned.	2
Yew	Taxus	Useable	2-3

Generally hardwoods are best for open fires because they tend not to spit excessively, however there are exceptions. Conifer wood tends to spit excessively when fresh, so it is best used in wood burning stoves, again there are exceptions. Many conifers cause an oily, sticky soot to form inside the chimney which can increase the risk of chimney fires. Once properly seasoned conifer wood can be successfully used on an open fire without excessive spitting. Ideally conifer wood is best mixed with hardwood.

Wood to be seasoned should be cut to length (250mm or 10"), split to size and stacked. The stacked wood should be completely covered on the top to prevent rain wetting the wood but air must be allowed to reach the side of the stack.

Leave to season for at least one year – more if possible.