



Using Firewood to Heat Your Home Part #1

People have always been fascinated with fire. Whether it is sitting around a campfire or using it to heat the house, the red flames seem to capture everyone's attention when sitting close to them. Fire has been used as a tool to heat with and to cook food since the introduction of the human race.

Many people in Missouri each year cut firewood to heat the family residence and other buildings. This can be a good heat source if done properly. My family heated with wood when I was growing up in Shannon County. We cut firewood from tree tops and cull logs that were left behind from timber harvest operations. Most of the time my father would bring home a truck load of cull logs with his log truck. We would cut up these logs and split them so the wood would season before burning.

Through the yearly duties of cutting firewood I learned the correct and incorrect way of preparing firewood for burning in the heating stove. The correct way is to cut the wood several months before burning so the wood can have time to season. Burning unseasoned wood can cause buildup inside of the stove pipes and chimney which can lead to flue fires.

Cutting firewood also creates other opportunities besides heating your home.

When cutting firewood the health of the forest can be improved by taking out the unhealthy trees and leaving the healthy ones - foresters call this Timber Stand Improvement. The purpose for Timber Stand Improvement cuts are to free desirable trees from competition, thin trees to desirable numbers and remove poorer trees. When deciding which tree to cut always look for the undesirable species, multiple sprouts/stems from one stump, low forked or crooked trees, swellings or bumps on the trunk that indicates internal damage, fire scars or other damage to the trunk and cull trees or wide spreading trees with excessive limbs.

Wildlife habitats can be enhanced by cutting trees for firewood. Edge feathering a field by cutting all the trees in a defined distance around the edge of the field can provide cover and valuable food for many different species of wildlife. Creating openings in the forest can provide early succession habitat for wildlife as well as a place to view wildlife. The left over portion of the firewood tree can be arranged into a brush pile which is outstanding for small mammals. One thing a firewood cutter should remember is not to cut all of the den trees. Den trees are actual homes for wildlife and a good many den trees should be retained in the forest. A few dead trees (snags) per acre creates habitat for

woodpeckers, bats and several other species of wildlife. Avoid attempts to make your woodland look like a park by removing brush and small trees in the under story. Low growing fruiting shrubs like ironwood, redbud, and dogwood are important to wildlife. They provide food and cover without severely competing with the taller trees.

Purchasing Firewood

When purchasing firewood you need to be aware that there are different units of measurements used by people to sell wood. The different units has caused lots of confusion about how much wood is in "rick", "rank", "cord", and a pickup load.

The standard unit of measure for firewood is the cord. A standard cord is 128 cubic feet. This may be 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet or any other combination yielding 128 cubic feet. A measure of one-third or one-half cord common has been called a "rick" although a rick is really just a pile of wood.

Another common measure used in selling firewood is the "face cord" which measures 4 feet by 8 feet and by some variable length in dimension. Commonly this length is 18 to 24 inches. Obviously, the depth measurement will determine just how much wood is contained in the face cord. "Rank" and "fireplace cord" also are used to describe the amount of wood in a face cord.

Missouri law requires that in the sale of firewood a bill of sale be provided showing the name and address of the purchaser and the seller and the cords or fractions of a cord involved in the sale.

Cutting firewood can help create wildlife habitat and increase the health of your forest. In addition, knowing how to sell or purchase firewood can reduce confusion and make the business transaction more pleasant. During part two of this article I will discuss the best species of wood to burn. I will briefly talk about energy usage of burning wood, and the disadvantages of using wood to heat your home.

Article by: John Tuttle-Forest Management Chief – MDC

Submitted by Peter Maki, Forestry Communication Specialist,
Top of the Ozarks RC&D

