



DRYING WOOD

The type of wood you burn – hardwood or softwood – matters less than how well it is dried. Really dry logs are easier to light, produce less tar to clog up your chimney and don't bring lots of insects into your home. Because the moisture content is lower they need less heat to drive off the water as steam and get hot more quickly. If your wood is really dry (moisture content 10% or less) you only need some paper and a few splinters to light it.

DRYING YOUR OWN LOGS

- Drying log wood well in the damp British climate requires a bit of planning.
- Wood should dry for at least a year, ideally two years for the best results so you need to plan 1 or 2 years ahead.
- Well vented wood sheds with space to separate wet and dry wood are ideal.
- Bringing wood inside a few days before burning will further reduce moisture.
- Having a constant airflow is critical to effective drying.
- Keep your logs off the ground on a pallet and away from vegetation
- Woodsheds against a wall or house need good air circulation behind the shed.

BUYING FIREWOOD

The most cost effective way to buy firewood is straight from the woodland as 2–3m (6–9') length logs. If you can work 2 years ahead and have the space you can cross cut these logs into 3' lengths (90–100 cm) and stack in the open on bearers or pallets for a year. Then cut down to the lengths you need, split and put in a wood shed or undercover to dry for a further year. Some woods such as birch and hornbeam should be split straight away after felling others can be left as logs for the first year. Birch bark in particular acts like a waterproof layer and slows drying. Splitting it lets the air in.

If you haven't got space or don't want to spend too much time on processing you can purchase loads or half loads of logs from log or firewood merchants. These will arrive on a trailer or truck usually filling approximately a cubic metre/half cube by volume respectively. They will be cut to a length, usually 15 – 50cm and split if more than 10 – 15 cm in diameter. Less common delivery methods are crates, dumpy bags or string bags. The drier the wood the more expensive the load but if you have space you can buy wetter wood and dry it yourself.





WOOD TIPS

- Check the type of wood. Ash, hornbeam, beech, birch are particularly good and chestnut is great in woodburners. Many loads will be a mixture of softwood and hardwood. If you have an open fire you won't want woods that spit such as chestnut or most softwoods.
- Ask how and for how long the logs have been seasoned. Logs sold as dry logs should have a moisture content below 20 – 25%. If you don't know what this feels like you can purchase relatively inexpensive moisture meters (web search: 'moisture meters for wood'). Bear in mind even well dried logs can feel wet on the surface after a rain shower.
- Ask whether the logs are being sold by weight or by volume (wetter logs are heavier);
- Check that your woodburner can accommodate the length of logs provided or be ready to cross cut them to length before you stack.

WHAT YOU NEED

A well vented wood shed or covered area

Nearby access for a truck or trailer or be prepared to move your logs with a wheelbarrow

Space to stack and process your wood

A sturdy log to split your wood on, a splitting maul, axe and wooden beater

A basket or box to carry wood inside and leave for a couple of days before burning



LIGHTING YOUR FIRE: You need 2 types of material to light a fire –

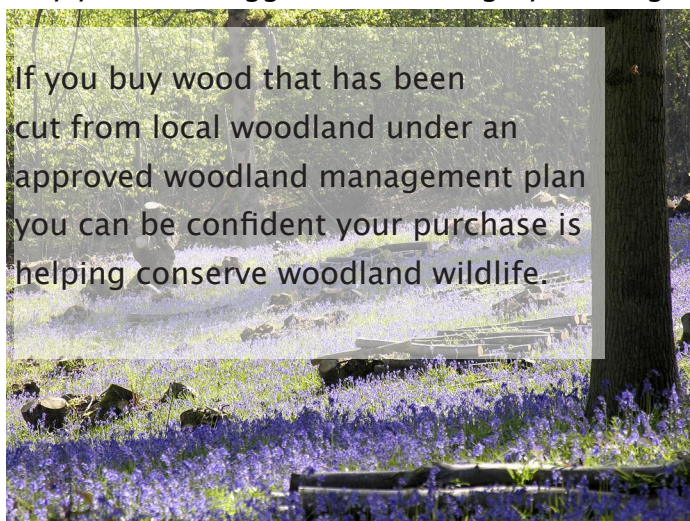
Tinder is dry material that ignites very easily with just a spark – twists of paper; cotton wool; birch bark; fine wood shavings; dry grass or evergreen needles.

Kindling is readily combustible material that you add to the burning tinder – pine cones; dry twigs; thinly split dry wood; cardboard. You can make and dry your own faggots for kindling by twisting and knotting sprays of birch twigs or stripped bark.

Once your kindling is burning rapidly add your main fuel: larger or split logs which burn more slowly and steadily. It can be useful to have a variety of dense and less dense woods, using light species for kindling and heavy ones for long-lasting burns.

CAUTION

You can burn all sorts of wood including logs and off cuts but remember treated timber, painted wood, laminates and particle boards will most likely have chemicals in paints and glues which can be particularly toxic when burnt. These items should be disposed off.



If you buy wood that has been cut from local woodland under an approved woodland management plan you can be confident your purchase is helping conserve woodland wildlife.