



UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

Wood as a Fuel No. 18

Firewood Permits, Selection, and Storage

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Heating with wood provides a heat like no other. Once you have made the decision to heat with wood you are ready to get a permit, gather the wood, and store it for those dark and cold days of winter.

Firewood gathering permits.

Most state and federal agencies in Idaho allow you to gather wood on their lands. Permits provide information to managers on how many people are gathering wood off of their lands also your contact information in case they need to relay information to you about fire danger, locations of active timber harvesting, or changes in road conditions. Get a map with your permit so you know where the boundaries of any given piece of state or federal land are located.

- The Idaho Department of Lands issues permits from their area offices. They have a minimum of 4 cords/\$20.00 minimum and each additional cord is \$5.00 up to their 10 cord maximum.
- The Forest Service issues permits from most of their offices throughout Idaho. They too have a 4 cords/\$20.00 minimum, with \$5.00 for each additional cord up to 12 cords. They take cash or checks only.



Many private landowners will also let people harvest firewood from their land. You must get permission from the land or timber owner before removing any wood. All wood, whether it is alive or dead, is private property on these lands. Make sure you fully understand where you are allowed to gather firewood and

to collect only dead and down material, unless other arrangements have been made with the landowner. It is also a good idea to get a "Bill of Sale" from the landowner before you transport your wood on public highways.

Firewood selection.

Gathering firewood to heat or supplement heating in your home can use a considerable amount of your time and energy. **All wood is NOT equal!** Know what kind of wood will best suit your purposes and get the good stuff. For example, you might select a mix of grand fir and white pine if you want an aesthetically pleasing fire that is easy to start and will only last a few hours. When you want maximum, long-lasting heat choose Douglas-fir or western larch. Many like to mix fast-burning wood such as pine with slower fuels, such as larch for a fire that will heat up a room quickly but last all night. Harder

wood makes better coals - this is important if you want a long lasting fire. Other wood throws a lot of sparks, maybe not the best to choose if you have an open fireplace. Most wood splits fairly easily, but some types are near impossible to get an axe into. Many are fragrant and a few smell pretty bad.

Table 1. provides fuelwood characteristics for the most commonly used species of trees in Idaho.

Curing and storing your wood.

Cure and store your wood properly. Fully cured or seasoned" wood has small cracks or "checks" in the ends and is much lighter than green wood.

Locate your main wood pile at least 30 feet from your home and any outbuildings to minimize fire danger. This minimizes damage to structures from insects harbored in the wood, particularly carpenter ants. Carpenter ants are large, black, or black and red, ants and are found throughout Idaho. They nest in dead wood, leaving sawdust piles by the infested wood, and can potentially to do more structural damage to your home and outbuildings than any other insect found in the state.

You can tap into your creative juices and make your woodpile a piece of art, as in this popular photo.



Or you can be like most of us and stack your wood neatly on pallets or lathe on a piece of well-drained land. If fully seasoned, cover it completely with a tarp to keep it dry. If your wood still needs to cure, cover the pile but allow air to circulate around the sides. Having a space by the wood pile to stack and split wood is a good idea, as is a box or other storage arrangement closer to the house where you can put a day or two's supply of wood for easy access.

Heat from a well-built fire warms as no other heat source. And as the old saying goes, you get warm four times from each piece of wood: when you gather it, when you split it, when you haul it to the house, and finally when you burn it!



Table 1. Fuelwood Characteristics.¹

Species	Heat ²	Ease of splitting	Ease of starting	Coaling qualities	Sparks	Frangrance
alder	M-L	easy	fair	good	moderate	slight
apple	VH	difficult	difficult	excellent	few	excellent
ash	H	easy-mod.	fair-diff.	excellent	few	slight
aspen	L	easy	easy	good	moderate	slight
birch	M	easy	easy	good	moderate	slight
cedar	M-L	easy	easy	poor	many	slight
cottonwood	L	easy	easy	good	moderate	slight
Douglas-fir (red fir)	M	easy	easy	fair	moderate	slight
elm	M	very diff.	fair	good	very few	fair
grand fir (white fir)	L	moderate	easy	poor	moderate	good
hemlock	M-L	easy	easy	poor	many	good
juniper	M	difficult	fair	good	many	good
western larch (tamarack)	M	easy-mod.	easy	fair	many	slight
locust	VH	very diff.	difficult	excellent	very few	slight
lodgepole pine	M-L	easy	easy	fair	moderate	good
ponderosa pine	M-L	moderate	fair	fair	moderate	good
poplar	L	easy	easy	fair	moderate	bitter
spruce	L	easy	easy	poor	few	slight
western white pine	M_L	easy	easy	poor	moderate	good
willow	L	easy	fair	poor	moderate	slight

¹ Modified from Hanley, D. Firewood Selection. CIS 472, University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System.

² VH=very high; H = high; M=medium; L=low.



Parts of this article are compiled from: Firewood Selection by Don Hanley, CIS 472; Firewood Gathering Permits by Don Hanley, CIS 473, and Wood Storage by Don Hanley, CIS474; all part of the original UI CES *Wood as a Fuel* Series.

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