

NEWS RELEASE  
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## SELECTING FIREWOOD AND USING ASHES

### BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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After a few fires in the woodstove already this season, it is again obvious that different wood species burn differently. Some of the differences have to do with the degree of dryness of the wood. The preferred moisture content is around 10-20 percent, but most of us do not have the equipment to measure this. Most wood needs at least six months of drying after cutting to reach the optimum moisture level.

The other significant difference among different wood types is related to their density. This is the weight of a cord of wood. The denser species weigh more and give off more heat per cord of wood. Interestingly, a pound of wood gives off about the same amount of heat regardless of species. The difference involved is how much volume of a particular species is required to weigh, for example, a ton. A stacked cord of oak firewood, 4 feet by 8 feet by 4 feet (128 cubic feet) weighs about 4,000 pounds. A similar cord of ponderosa pine weighs only 2,400 pounds. Thus the oak cord will provide over 60% more heat than a cord of pine.

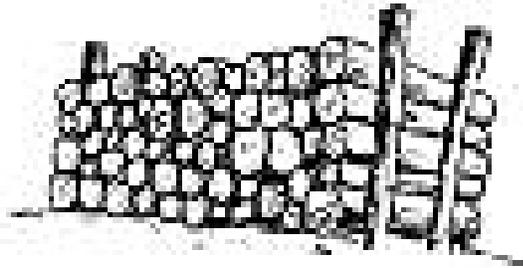
In terms of price, if a cord of oak costs \$200, a cord of pine, in terms of amount of heat provided, should only cost \$120.

Other wood species and their weight per cord include: Apple – 4,140 lbs.; Oak (blue) – 4,050 lbs.; Pine (ponderosa) – 2,380 lbs.; Cottonwood – 2,110 lbs.

After burning firewood, the resulting ashes may be useful in the garden, with some precautions. Ashes contain phosphorus and potassium, major plant nutrients, plus a number of

minor nutrients. However, ashes are very alkaline, with a pH of 10 to 12. They can be harmful to plants at high rates, especially in soils that are already alkaline. Also, about 80 to 90 percent of wood ashes are water-soluble minerals, which can cause plant-damaging salts to build up in soils. To be safe, use only 10 to 15 pounds of wood ashes per 1,000 square feet of garden soil per year. It's best to till the ashes into the soil three to four weeks ahead of planting. Because ashes are so alkaline, do not use them around azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons and other acid-loving plants.

If you are wondering how much ash a typical fireplace will produce, using two cords of wood will yield about 50 pounds of softwood ash or 160 pounds of hardwood ash.



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