

For Charlotters who burn wood for home heating, or as a romantic nostalgia for past campfires, now is a good time to procure firewood so that it may dry over the summer months. It is important for heating efficiency and to minimize fire-starting problems and creosote build-up, that the wood be as dry as possible. Green (relatively fresh-cut wood) may have moisture contents of around 50-60%. When dried out it can attain a moisture content of around 15-20%.

Many of our local fuelwood suppliers have both green and air-dried wood for sale, with a price differential. Delivery at this time of year when the ground is still frozen may enable a load to be dumped off closer to the site where you will be stacking the wood. For best drying, sticks of wood should be piled loosely but neatly, (see photograph) and under a cover to protect the pile from rain or snow. The bottom tier should be piled on a base of some kind rather than on the ground. Best drying occurs when there is air access from all sides as in the photo of my own woodshed. Split wood dries out faster than round wood of the same volume due to the bark covering. Small wood sticks dry faster than large ones. Open pored, lighter species such as ash dry faster than dense ones such as beech.

As standard cord of wood is 128 cubic feet and is conceived as a pile 4 feet x 4 feet x 8 feet. Firewood is usually sold and measured as a face cord, -- a pile 4 feet high x 8 feet long x length of sticks to fit your purpose, -- usually 12-16 inches. It is usually reckoned that a standard cord of dry, dense hardwood has the heating value of 200 gallons of fuel oil, but only if burned in one of the newer, heat-efficient stoves. Not only does dry wood yield more heat, it is easier to ignite, and produces less creosote when burned.

Fortunately in Charlotte we have available a number of tree species with the higher energy contents per cord. Oaks and hickory rate just higher than sugar maple and beech, but all are excellent. Elm from dead or dying elms that have succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease is often included in mixed batches of firewood, and is good, though often harder to split. Our white and green ashes are experiencing a die-back that results in ash also being a

common species in the mix, and may be partially dry. While the heating value is not quite as good as those aforementioned, its ease of splitting and somewhat lower moisture content makes it a favorite.

When buying wood, it is prudent to promote forest conservation by making sure that your wood supplier has obtained wood from sustainably harvested sources. It is imperative that if there is ash included, that it be obtained from local Vermont sources due to the threat of emerald ash borer, -- a devastating destroyer now present in some neighboring states.

Since open air drying will require about six months, if you wish to use wood next heating season, now is the time to obtain your wood. There are at least nine firewood suppliers in Charlotte and at least four nearby who deliver into Charlotte. A list of suppliers is posted in Town Hall on the bulletin board.

Larry Hamilton
Tree Warden