# Firewood

## Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

Forest owners can convert leftovers from thinnings, improvement cuttings, or commercial harvests into firewood. They have the option of selling on a "you-cut" basis, cutting and selling on-site, selling to (or at) a firewood lot, or delivering to the customer.

Buyers can get the best price by shopping around. "Want adds", yellow pages, bulletin boards, word of mouth, or roadside signs are means of finding and advertising firewood. Some landowners, utilities, landfills, wood products industries and state forests will let "do-it-yourselfers" cut wood for a fee.

***Dense or heavy woods*** such as hickory and oak burn long at a sustained rate and contain the greatest amount of energy per cord. ***Light woods*** provide a quick bright fire. They contain only ½ to 2/3 the energy of heavy woods and should be priced somewhat lower.

**Yellow pine** contains pitch that burns hot but is sooty. Yellow pine and especially **cedar** pop a lot, which can be enjoyable and safe behind glass fireplace doors.

**Oak, beech**, **ash and hackberry** are good, easy-to-split firewoods. **Sycamore, blackgum and elm** are almost impossible to split by hand. **Hickory** is difficult to split, but it and **sugar (hard) maple** make good beds of coals.

Firewood is sold by the ***cord, rick*** and ***pickup load***. A **cord** is a stack of wood 4'wide, 4' high and 8' long. A **rick** is a fraction of a cord. An 8'x4'x24" rick contains ½ cord. A rick of 16" pieces is 1/3 cord. A load in a full-sized pickup can vary from 1/3 to ½ cord, which is 1 to 1½ ricks of 16" wood. A cord of heavy wood weighs about 2 tons cured and 3 tons green.

A rick might be stacked loosely or tightly. Small round pieces should fill the voids between large round pieces, and split pieces should fit closely. Unless the price is right, avoid firewood made up mainly of small limbs, which make for a loose rick and a lot of bark. Avoid knotty pieces that are too big for your fireplace or stove. Cover stacks to keep wood from deteriorating. Two to three cords will usually last a winter.

**Wood should be air-dried for at least 6 months, and preferably 9.** Well-cured firewood is grayish on the end, with radial cracks. "Green" wood is difficult to light, burns cool, smokes a lot, and can leave deposits of tar in the chimney that can cause dangerous flue fires. Those who burn uncured wood might need their chimney swept often. Woodcutters can speed up curing by felling and leaving trees in summer. The leaves will draw much of the water out of the wood.

**Heat content (million BTU/chord), 20% moisture:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hickories | | 30.8-32.1 |
| Oak: willow, swamp white | 29.6-30.8 | |
| post, scarlet, swamp chestnut | 28.7 | |
| chestnut, southern red, white | 28.3 | |
| northern red, overcup, water | 27.0 | |
| black | | 26.1 |
| Locust, black | | 28.3 |
| Beech | | 27.4 |
| Maple, sugar | | 27.0 |
| Elm, rock | 27.0 | |
| Ash, white | | 25.7 |
| Walnut, black | | 23.6 |
| Maple, red | | 23.2 |
| Sweetgum | | 22.3 |
| Hackberry | | 22.1 |
| Pine, yellow | | 21.8 |
| Cherry, black | | 21.4 |
| Elm, American | | 21.4 |
| Sycamore | | 21.0 |
| Yellow-poplar | | 18.0 |
| Sassafras | | 17.5 |
| Cottonwood | | 17.1 |
| Hemlock | 17.1 | |
| Willow | | 16.7 |
| Pine, white | | 15.0 |

Firewood can be difficult to identify. With some practice, a simple "heft test" can distinguish dense from light firewood.

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