

Get the most heat from your firewood

Not all firewood is equal – dry wood gives more heat and less smoke. Here's how to get maximum heat from the wood you burn.

Save money - get your firewood early

Buying or collecting your own firewood early gives you more time to dry it before use. Firewood is also generally cheaper in spring and summer.

Stay warm - burn dry firewood

Dry firewood gives off more heat and will keep you and your home warmer. Wet wood still burns, but the water in it means it gives off less heat. Your firewood should have less than 20 per cent moisture content.

Dry firewood is cleaner to burn and causes less smoke and air pollution, with fewer associated health problems than wet wood. Smoke contains harmful particles, not visible to the human eye and small enough to get into human lungs and cause health problems. In winter, most of these harmful particles come from wood burned for heating in homes, not from industry or vehicles. Burning wet or green wood also builds up the layers of toxic pollutants in your chimney.



Some firewood suppliers sell pre-dried wood. It might cost more, but the extra heat it provides could outweigh the extra cost.

Treated or painted wood, plywood, MDF, particleboard and driftwood give off toxic substances when they burn, so should never be used in your home fire. The toxic substances can damage your health and that of others, as well as your fireplace, woodburner and chimney. Instead of burning household rubbish and recyclables, use kerbside recycling and rubbish collection services. Many items in your rubbish and recycling create toxins when burned.

Tips for drying firewood

Even if your firewood is dry, storing it well will keep it that way. Here's how:



Split large bits of wood into pieces no more than 10-15cm thick.



Remove bark, or stack the wood with the bark at the bottom, so the moisture can evaporate. Bark slows down the drying process.



Stack the wood in a covered, well-ventilated area with a roof or tarpaulin.



The length of time for it to dry depends on the type of wood and how wet it is. Softwoods, like pine and macrocarpa, normally take 6-12 months. Hardwoods like gum can take up to 18 months.

Check if the firewood's dry

If your firewood is dry it will have cracks in the ends. Knock two pieces together. If it sounds hollow it is probably seasoned and dry enough to burn.

To check if your wood is dry enough to burn well, put a small piece of wood on glowing embers in your woodburner. If the top and sides catch fire in less than a minute, it's good to burn.