Buying Firewood

A roaring fire in the fireplace can be a warming, romantic touch on a cold winter's day. Under the right conditions, heating a room with wood also can be energy-saving. economical step to take. But be careful when purchasing firewood, cautions the Better Business Bureau. There's more than one way to get burned.

As with any purchase, it's possible to minimize the risk of trouble if the buyer knows the reputation of the seller. Also, be sure to check the local market rate and ask a few questions about the type of wood being purchased.

Since firewood is an infrequent purchase, few consumers are aware of the prevailing price. Inquire around to get the best deal. but be wary of a drastically low, out-of-line price. Why end up with less wood than bargained for or wood that is too green to burn? Verify that delivery is included in the quote and that there are no other hidden costs.

Understanding the Quantity

Most people know that wood is often sold by the "cord," but exactly how much is that? A standard cord is defined as a wellstacked pile of logs, eight feet by four feet by four feet. This is the equivalent of 128 cubic feet of wood and weighs about two tons.

Since few home fireplaces can burn wood that's four by eight feet long, wood is usually sold as a "face cord" or "tier." This is a pile four by eight feet on a side and cut into desired lengths. For example, a "face cord" of 16-inch pieces is actually one-third of a standard cord. Be sure to understand which type of cord is being purchased and for what price.

Keep in mind, too, that' although a firewood salesperson may talk about a "rick" of wood, there is no precise meaning to the term. It can mean different amounts, depending on who is selling, so be sure to get more specific with that vendor.

In some areas of the nation it is more common to buy firewood by the ton. If so, look for the driest wood available. There's no point in paying for extra water.

Types of Wood

The type of wood is also an important factor. Hardwoods like oak, birch, hickory and maple burn slowly with a minimum of smoke. By comparison, softwoods are easier to ignite because they are resinous, but they burn more rapidly. Examples of softwood are pine, spruce, fir and other evergreens.

That softwood residue is what creates creosote deposits in a chimney. There is a potential danger that the creosote can ignite, so burning softwoods will require more caution and diligent chimney

maintenance. A third category of wood comes from fruit and nut trees, such as apple, cherry, beech or pecan. These smoke with an aroma that resembles the tree's fruit. The wood often sells at a higher price than hardwoods with greater heating value, but fruit tree woods burn with a steady, pleasant flame.

For the most economical fire, stick with the hardwoods. Otherwise, a combination of the woods types can be worthwhile. Softwood can make the fire start quickly, the hardwood will make it last long and the fruit wood will add a fragrance.

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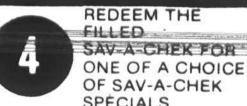


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