

The burning properties of wood



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The burning properties of woods referred to in this factsheet are for dry, seasoned wood. All woods burn better when seasoned and some burn better when split rather than as whole logs.

In wet weather if you have no dry kindling go to the nearest hedge. You can always find dry dead wood for starting a fire in the thickest part of the hedge, but take care not to damage the hedge itself.

* Woods marked with an asterisk are not likely to come to hand very often these days, but can be found particularly on old farms and long established forests.

Alder Poor in heat and does not last.

Apple Splendid. It burns slowly and steadily with little flame but good heat. The scent is also pleasing.

Ash The best burning wood providing both flame and heat and if necessary will burn when green.

Beech A rival to ash, though not as good and only fair when green.

Birch The heat is good but it burns quickly. The smell is pleasant.

Blackthorn Quite one of the best woods. Burns slowly, with good heat and little smoke.

*Cedar Needs to be fully dried. Full of snap and crackle. It gives little flame but much heat and the scent is beautiful.

Cherry	Burns slowly with good heat. Another wood with the advantage of a pleasant scent.
Douglas Fir	Little flame or heat.
Elder	Mediocre. Very smoky quick burner with not much heat.
Elm	Unpredictable since Dutch elm disease. Can, but not always, smoke violently. One large log put on before bed will keep the fire in for the morning.
Hawthorn	Similar to blackthorn.
Hazel	Good.
Holly	Good only when seasoned.
Hornbeam	Almost as good as beech.
Horse Chestnut	Good flame and heating power but spits a lot.
Larch	Crackly, scented and fairly good for heat.
Laurel	Has a brilliant flame.
Lime	Poor. Burns with a dull flame.
Maple	Good.
Oak	It is sparse in flame and the smoke is acrid. Very old dry seasoned oak is excellent for heat, burning slowly and steadily and producing little ash.

Pear	A good heat and a good scent.
Pine	Burns with a splendid flame, but is apt to spit. The resinous Weymouth pine has a lovely scent and a cheerful blue flame.
*Plane	Burns pleasantly but can throw sparks if very dry.
Plum	Good heat and scent.
Poplar	Poor to fair.
*Rhododendron	The thick old stems, being very tough, burn well.
*Robinia (Acacia)	Burns slowly with good heat but with acrid smoke.
Spruce	Burns too quickly and with too many sparks.
Sycamore	Burns with a good flame with moderate heat.
*Walnut	Good with a pleasant scent.
Willow	Poor. Burns slowly with little flame even when seasoned and is apt to spark.
*Yew	Last but one of the best. Burns slowly with a fierce heat and the scent is pleasant.

A rhyme to help you to remember

*These hardwoods burn well and slowly,
Ash, beech, hawthorn oak and holly.
Softwoods flare up quick and fine,
Birch, fir, hazel, larch and pine.
Elm and willow you'll regret,
Chestnut green and sycamore wet*