

A guide to:

Getting the *most* from your woodburner.

A well-managed fire produces more heat and less air pollution.

This factsheet has information and advice that will help you get more, for less.

Did you know that?

You should only burn paper, cardboard and untreated wood in a woodburner

Choosing the right wood

Most New Zealand woodburners are designed to work best when burning softwood such as oregon, pine or macrocarpa, rather than hardwoods. If in doubt, check with the maker of your burner to ensure you choose the right wood.

Wood that is ready to use should have a moisture content of less than 25%. You can tell roughly by its weight, as dry wood is considerably lighter. Dry wood will also show signs of splitting from its centre.

Make sure that what you are buying suits your needs. Check with your firewood supplier if the wood they are selling is seasoned and ready to burn.

Is your wood too wet?

You can check the moisture content of a firewood sample at any time of year, free of charge, at Environment Canterbury's offices in Christchurch or Timaru. During winter, Ashburton District Council can test firewood at their offices.

Buy your firewood early

It's best to buy seasoned wood well ahead of winter. Winter deliveries may be rain-wet and need time to dry before use.

If you are buying unseasoned wood or cutting your own firewood, allow at least nine months for it to dry properly before you intend to use it. Hardwoods such as blue gum may take longer to season because they are so dense.

The best way to store wood

Unseasoned wood should be stacked in a loose but stable pile, preferably in a northerly facing position where the sun and wind will help to dry it. As soon as it feels ready, store it under cover where the rain can't get at it.

Seasoned wood should be stored under cover, preferably raised above ground level on spaced bricks and stacked so that air can circulate through it.

Together we can improve our air

What not to burn

Burning treated wood can release toxins into the air and produce contaminated ash. Burning CCA timber is particularly bad for people's health as it will release poisonous arsenic into the air.

Treated wood includes:

- any wood product with a coating, such as melamine or formica,
- CCA¹ treated wood such as fencing or decking,
- Painted, stained or varnished wood,
- MDF or custom wood, chipboard or plywood (these contain glues and binding agents).

Starting a fire quickly

Getting a fire up to temperature quickly is important - your firebox needs to be hot to work properly. A cooler fire doesn't get as much heat from your wood and will produce more smoke and invisible emissions that together reduce air quality.

Firstly, open the air vent fully – this will ensure your fire has enough air to allow it to burn properly.

Start off with a layer of newspaper, crumpled or twisted so that it doesn't burn too quickly. Place a layer of dry, finely-split kindling on top of the newspaper, running across the burner. Lay a few smaller pieces of firewood on top of the kindling, running front to back. Open the air controller fully and light the paper in a number places across the front of your fire. Close the door of your burner.

Once the kindling and small firewood is burning brightly, add more wood to the fire as needed. Avoid adding too much at once, as this may restrict air flow and cause your fire to smoke.

Using your burner well

Even when the air vent is only partly closed, the airflow through the firebox is reduced so that wood will burn less efficiently. Try to keep it as near to fully open as possible and use the amount of wood you add to vary the heat output.

Large chunks of wood often burn less efficiently and finely cut wood can burn too quickly. Cut it to the right size for your fire - check with the manufacturer of your burner for advice.

Pollution Hotline

Most fires need 20 minutes or so to get going properly. During this time they will emit more smoke. Once they get up to temperature they are much less smoky if they are being used properly and if the right sort of wood is being burned. If you are bothered by a chimney that stays smoky or smelly for a long time, and the issue can't be resolved privately, you can phone 0800 76 55 88 and report it to the 24-hour Pollution Hotline.

More details

For the home heating rules in your town, or about air pollution, visit www.ecan.govt.nz/Air or call Customer Services on 03 353 9007 from within Christchurch, 0800 324 636 from elsewhere in Canterbury.

¹ CCA is a wood treatment containing copper, chromium and arsenic to protect wood from rot and insect pests. All treated wood residue such as sawdust and offcuts should go to landfill for disposal, not in recycling or green waste bins.