

Did you know that a chunk of green firewood can be over 50 percent water? Of course you did !!! You've tried to burn that wood, and it was no more combustible than celery. So now you season your firewood before you burn it. But just how well are you seasoning that wood?

Burning green wood requires about 30 percent of the wood's BTU's to be used to drive moisture out of the wood. Whether you buy your wood or cut and split it yourself, that loss of potential heat is an insult to either your wallet, or your back. The cooler combustion you get from green wood creates cooler smoke, which tends to condense and adhere to your flue. The resulting hardened tar-like substance is creosote – a highly flammable combination of carbon and incompletely burned oils. Creosote is a major contributor to chimney fires.

Cut and split firewood needs time, cover, and air circulation to season. Wood is considered seasoned when the “free water” (the liquid and vapor in cell cavities) migrates to the surface and the end of a log and evaporates. Time is pretty much a set variable; as a general rule, you'll need six months to a year for the moisture content to drop to between 20 – 25 percent. Without proper coverage though, your wood can reabsorb moisture.

Most people will stack their wood on a north – south axis and cover it with the “go-to” blue tarp or metal roofing. They keep it off the ground using wooden rails or pallets. While the air circulation is excellent, the cover is not that good. Inevitably, rain water leaks in through seams or holes, and the exposed wood ends would get soaked by the rain. In the end the wood ends up wet or covered with snow by the time it is ready to burn for heat. And then there is that hissing and bubbling at the ends when it gets burned. This wood is technically seasoned, but still wet even though it has been split, stacked and covered for nine months.

Think of wood as a sponge. On those breezy, warm, low humidity days in June, it dries well and quickly. But then during those raw, rainy October and November days, the wet wood ends reabsorb the moisture. Good air circulation, bad coverage. It can also be difficult to season wood that has been magnificently covered, as in a basement or fully enclosed wood shed, because there is little air circulation to carry away the moisture as it comes out of the wood. You can't dry a sponge in a zip lock baggie, right?

A word about bark. Bark is like a lid on a piece of wood if the wood is stacked bark side up. It will keep water from being absorbed into the wood if it is stacked in the elements. Likewise, it will help to prevent moisture from escaping from the wood. So stack bark up if your wood is exposed to the weather, bark side down, if it is completely covered.

Far and away the best solution is a wood shed that completely covers the wood from the elements but also allows the free flow of air on at least two sides. You get the benefit of great air circulation from warm breezes, which carry away the moisture driven out of the wood, but at the same time, the wood cannot reabsorb moisture because it is always covered and therefore dry. Be sure to get it up off the ground-wood can absorb moisture from below, even in a woodshed. And stack your wood in your shed bark- side down.

You may find that the cost of building a woodshed will pay for itself in just a few short years with the BTUs saved. Both your wallet and your back will thank you.

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