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TIPS FOR BUYING FIREWOOD

Relaxing around a warm, crackling fireplace is an enjoyable way to spend a cold winter evening. Homeowners that purchase firewood need to know what they are buying to get the best quality for the money spent. The following are some tips from someone who I respect, Dennis Adams, UNL Extension Forester.

Firewood is sold in several measurement units that include cord, face-cord, rick or pick-up load. A cord contains 128 cubic feet of wood and is usually measured as a stack of wood 8 feet long, 4 feet tall and 4 feet wide. A rick contains one-third of a cord or a stack of wood 8 feet long, 4 feet tall and 16 inches wide. The cord and rick are standard units of volume and easy in comparing prices. However, the amount of wood in a face-cord or pickup load may be deceiving. A face-cord is a stack of wood 8 feet long and 4 feet high but the width can vary from 12 to 30 inches. A pickup load can mean almost anything depending on the size of the pickup's bed and the height to which it is stacked. In order to compare prices, estimate the cubic foot volume of wood. A standard cord has a volume of 128 cubic feet. But it is not all wood; some is air space. Depending on how the logs are stacked, only 60 to 110 cubic feet may be solid wood.

To get the most wood for one's money, look for round unsplit wood. Round wood has more solid wood content per cord than split wood. Split wood that is loosely stacked or contains crooked pieces may contain about a third less wood than a tight cord of round wood. A cord of tightly stacked logs may contain 25 to 45 percent more actual wood than irregular or loosely piled wood. A cord of short-length logs, approximately 12-16 inches, may contain 15 to 20 percent more actual wood than a cord of 4-foot logs.

Green, or wet, wood shrinks when it dries. This shrinkage can reduce the volume of a cord by 8 to 10 percent. So buying green wood means paying for an extra 10 to 13 cubic feet of air space.

The species of wood should also be considered. Each species burns differently. Hard, heavy woods such as hickory, ash and oak produce short flames and burn slowly. Soft, light woods such as cottonwood, willow and pine produce large flames and burn rapidly. Generally, hard heavy woods are considered better firewood because they produce more heat per unit of volume than lighter woods.

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