

## Wood heating: is it right for you?

The energy crisis of the mid-1970s is behind us, but high fuel prices are here now and even higher ones are likely to follow. That has led a growing number of Canadians to explore the potential for heating their homes with wood.

Energy-efficient wood-burning stoves are now available in a wide variety of designs, including traditional-looking equipment that has all the benefits of modern technology. Homeowners interested in heating with wood are almost certain to find an appliance that matches their decor.

Appearance is important, but it is only one of many considerations when purchasing wood-burning equipment. In fact, before you even begin to look at appliances you should ensure that you have access to a secure, reasonably priced wood supply. If you do, and you are willing to devote the extra time and attention required to operate a safe and efficient system, you'll find that heating with wood can be a rewarding experience in terms of comfort, aesthetics and cost.

### Appliances

Selecting the appropriate wood-burning appliance for your needs will probably require some research and comparative shopping. You'll find that proper installation of wood-heating equipment is expensive; obviously, it costs more to install a central heating system than a free-standing stove. Also, central heating systems do not lend themselves to self-installation. Wood stoves and furnaces range in price from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, and an approved chimney system can cost more than the appliance.

Wood-burning appliances come

in a variety of types, shapes and sizes. They include space heaters, pellet-burning stoves, cookstoves, forced-air wood furnaces, boilers, add-on furnaces and boilers, and dual-fuel furnaces. The equipment you select will depend largely on the role you intend it to play in the home.

Spend some time becoming familiar with the various options. With sufficient information about your heating requirements and the proposed location of the appliance, an informed dealer can usually recommend the appropriate type and size of equipment for your needs.

It is important to buy equipment that has been tested and labeled to the standards of the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or the Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC). Before you purchase any equipment, check with your insurance agent about coverage. Some companies charge higher premiums for homes equipped with wood-burning appliances.

### The chimney

The chimney is as important as the heater itself. Unless you are an accomplished do-it-yourselfer, completely familiar with local building and fire codes, and have access to advice from a specialized heating appliance dealer, your chimney should be installed by a professional, preferably inside the house rather than on an exterior wall.

Proper installation is only the first step toward safe operation. You should also have the chimney inspected regularly and cleaned when necessary.

### Safety

Wood-burning heating appli-

cances require more maintenance and attention than electric, oil or natural gas systems. This is because creosote, a flammable byproduct of incomplete wood combustion, continually accumulates on the inside surfaces of the heating equipment, particularly in the flue pipe and chimney. As little as 6 mm (1/4 in.) of creosote can result in a chimney fire.

You can slow down the build-up of creosote by using a chimney that is insulated and an efficient appliance, by burning well-seasoned wood, and by building hot, quick-burning fires. However, regular chimney inspection and cleaning are the best ways to avoid problems. Your home should also be equipped with smoke detectors.

Ashes should be removed from wood-burning appliances as often as necessary. This can range from once a week for an appliance used as the primary source of heat, to once a month (or less) for supplementary wood heaters.

Although creosote is the common enemy, carbon monoxide (an odourless, colourless and tasteless gas) is the most dangerous product of incomplete wood combustion in the home. To avoid this problem, ensure that your system has good draft and that you burn small, hot fires rather than large smouldering ones.

### The fuel supply

The efficiency of a wood-heating system is affected by the quality of the fuel. Firewood should be dried in the open air, preferably under a cover to keep the rain off, for one year before use. Seasoned firewood burns more efficiently, giving more heat to the house per

cord of wood while lessening the potential for dangerous creosote build-up in your chimney. In addition to having a reliable source of wood, you will need to have adequate covered storage space for your winter supply.

Firewood dealers regularly advertise in local newspapers and on community billboards. You might want to ask a wood-burning friend or neighbour to recommend a supplier from past experience.

Make sure you know what you're getting when you purchase firewood from a dealer. The common cord measurement for firewood is 1.2 m X 1.2 m X 2.4 m (4' X 4' X 8'). However, other measurements are also used, including "stove cords" and "face cords", which are considerably smaller than a cord. When price shopping, make sure you are comparing the same amount of wood.


You should also pay attention to the species of wood you are buying. Dense hardwoods, such as maple,

oak and ash, are preferable for wood heating and command premium prices. Softer, less-dense species, such as poplar and spruce, are less expensive and are ideal for small, fast fires in the spring and fall, when high heat output is not needed.

Only experience will tell you how much wood you need for the winter. A medium-sized modern house, if heated exclusively with wood, would need between four and six cords. In the same house, a space heater used for part of the day may consume two to four cords, while reducing conventional fuel use by more than 50 per cent. Considerably more wood will be required under very cold conditions or for large, leaky, poorly-insulated houses.


A comprehensive booklet on burning wood in the home, *Residential Wood Heating: A Homeowner's Guide*, is available by writing to Energy, Mines & Resources Canada, Residential Energy Management Division, 580 Booth St., Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E4.



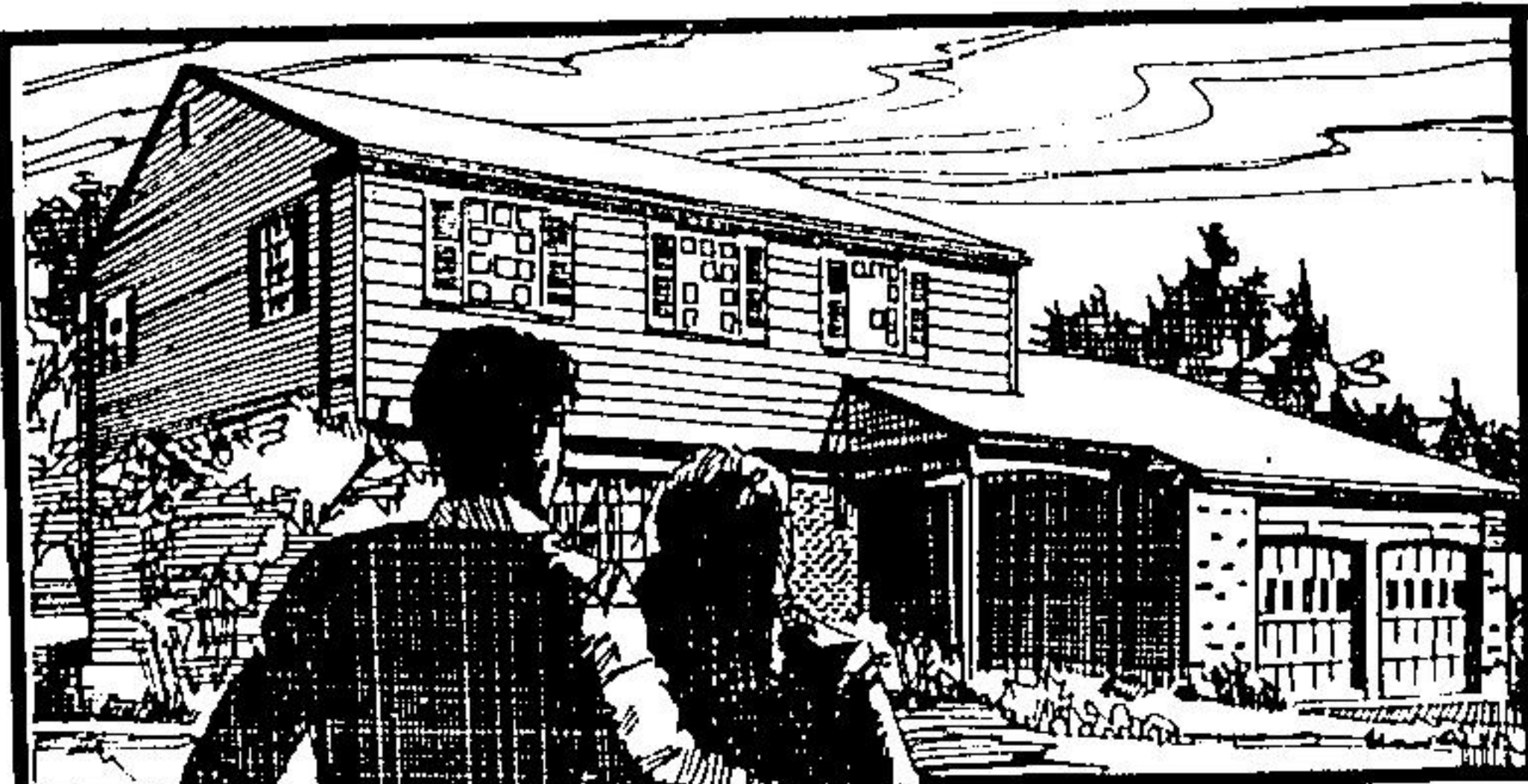


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