

Home & Energy...

Choosing the right firewood

Laying in a supply of firewood for the winter is a common Canadian activity for rural and urban residents alike.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation offers useful tips and information on choosing firewood.

Tree species

Hardwoods are best for burning because they tend to produce a longer-lasting ember bed. Soft woods, while generating heat, burn faster.

A list of common Canadian trees species, starting from the hardest, is: Ironwood, Rock Elm, Hickory, Oak, Sugar Maple, Beech, Yellow Birch, Ash, Red Elm, Red Maple, Tamarack, Douglas fir, White Birch, Manitoba Maple, Red Alder, Hemlock, Poplar, Pine, Basswood, Spruce and Balsam.

Drying

Green wood is 35 to 50 per cent moisture

when it is cut. As a result, burning is difficult and ineffective.

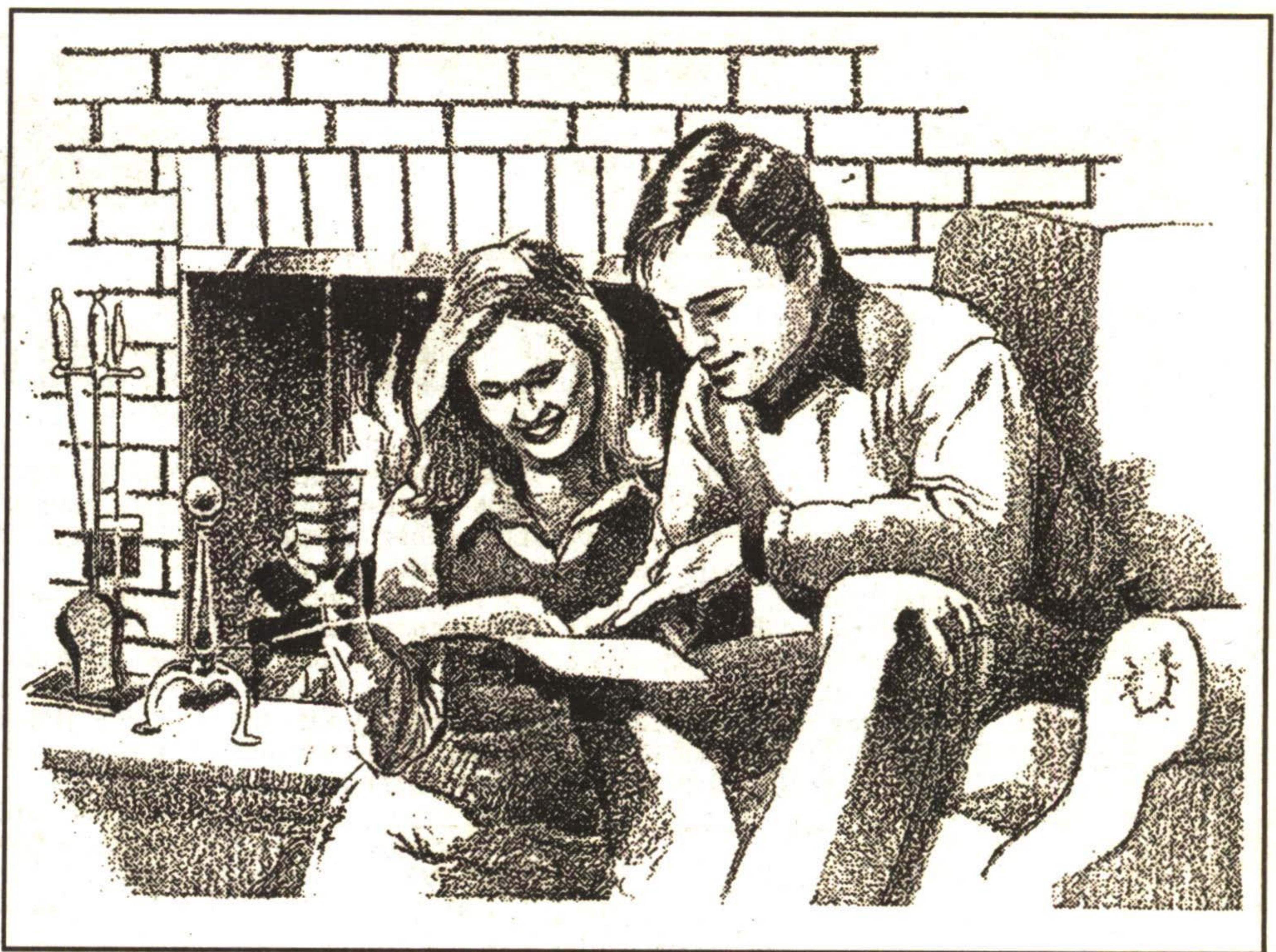
Splitting the wood and allowing it to dry over a summer reduces moisture to about 20 per cent; the wood then burns more efficiently. (Two or three days' supply of wood should be stored indoors; putting cold wood on the fire cools and prevents proper combustion.)

Buying wood

A "true" cord of wood - sometimes called a country cord - is 1.2m x 1.2m x 2.4m (4ft x 4ft x 8ft) but, often wood is sold according to its width. A face cord, for example, is 400mm (16 inches) x 1.2m x 2.4m.

Purchasers should measure the length of the stick of wood to determine the cost per true cord for comparison purposes.

It is hard to estimate how much wood is in a pile on the back of a truck or station wagon and, as a result, hard to determine whether wood purchased in this way is cost effective.



Making a comeback

Advanced technology has moved wood-burners out of the basement into the living room as Canadians return to wood as a source of heat in their homes.

About 20 per cent of Canadian single-family homes now rely on wood either as the primary or secondary source of heat, a sharp reversal of the post Second World War trend when homeowners turned to other heating methods. Wood began looking attractive again in the 1970s when price and supply of other fuels caused anxiety.

Changes in the design and effectiveness of the wood-burning systems have also contributed to the revival with attractive units now designed for main living areas. The trend back to wood is expected to continue as more advances are made in both technology and appearance.

Two types of stoves which are expected to

grow in popularity burn either pellets or wood chips. The pellets are formed from biomass waste and are expected to become more readily available as the need to dispose of these wastes increases. Fed to the firebox from a hopper, the pellets can provide heat for several hours without tending. Wood chip-burners are likely to become more common for heating commercial buildings.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Natural Resources Canada have a publication on heating with wood with information ranging from a description of various heating options to chimney requirements and how to get the most heat out of the wood being burned.

Called A Guide to Residential Wood Heating, it is available by writing to Energy Publications, c/o Canada Communication Group, Ottawa, K1A 0S9.

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