

Convert your wood fireplace to gas

With autumn soon here and the nights ever colder, your thoughts will eventually turn to your fireplace. After all, in the chilly months, there's no better way to relax—and defrost—than by snuggling up to a fire. Think back to purchasing your home. Surely the wood-burning fireplace was a major selling point.

But it's time to 'fess up: how often do you use it? If you're like many homeowners, probably only as often as you can tolerate lugging heavy wood through the house (or paying big bucks for synthetic logs), searching for kindling, worrying about the fire going out and cleaning up the messy ashes afterward.

The hassle of wood is one reason why so many people are choosing natural gas fireplaces these days. Other natural gas benefits include higher efficiency, cleaner air and cost savings. Based on typical usage, it costs about \$110 annually to operate a natural gas fireplace. A wood-burning unit costs about \$250 to operate. Learn more about the benefits of natural gas fireplaces at uniongas.com.

But if you already have a masonry wood-burning fireplace, you're not out of luck. Converting from wood to gas is simple, affordable and surprisingly speedy.

Start your renovation project today and by holiday season you'll be able to gather around the hearth with family and friends.

All you really need is a natural gas insert: a self-contained box with a glass front, containing a burner and ceramic logs that fits inside your existing fireplace. You'll find them at your local fireplace retailer.

What should you look for when shopping? Your first consideration is size. Bring measurements (height, width and depth) of your current fireplace with you to find the correct sized insert, recommends Bill Lassaline, owner of The Source, a fireplace retailer with locations in Hamilton and Greenville.

You should also consider an insert's heating BTU output, which typically range from 10,000 to 40,000 BTUs. Your choice will mostly depend on the size of your room.

Energy efficiency is a factor as well. The EnerGuide labelling system, long used to identify energy efficient appliances, now rates gas fireplaces.

Appearance is also a consideration. Selection is vast when it comes to faceplates, louvers, doors, tiling and mantles. Traditional finishes such as black marble are still around, but consider modern, creative finishes such as glass tile and stainless steel, and new styles such as exposed sides.

Non-aesthetic optional features to look for include a fan or blower, which distributes the heat (most inserts come with one) and a thermostatic remote control, which lets you adjust the size of your fire from the comfort of your couch.

Once you've ordered your insert and faceplate, talk to the retailer about scheduling installation.

The technicians will take care of everything, including attaching the gas line and installing the chimney liner, and within four to six hours, you could be relaxing next to a beautiful fire—which you started with the flick of a switch.

—News Canada

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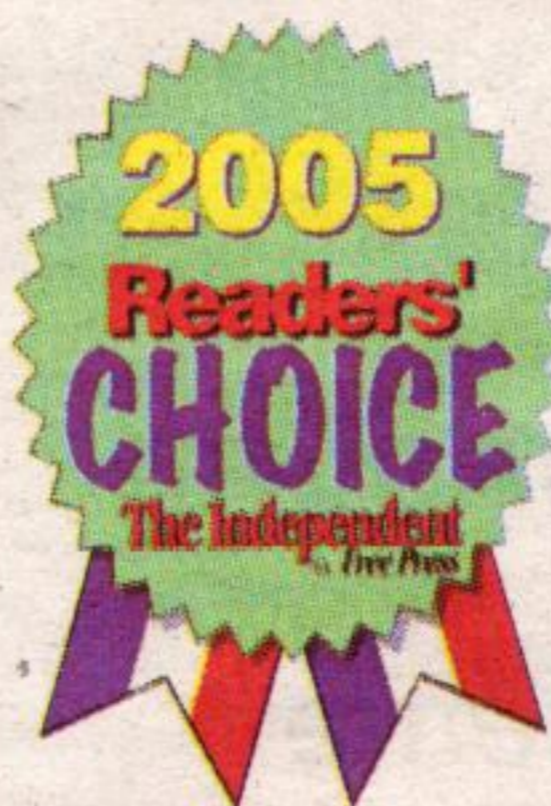
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