Many folks in both the suburbs, the country and in urban neighborhoods are using wood heat to warm their homes. This is not a new phenomenon. A resurgence of using wood heat happens every so often. Our family runs a sawmill business and when oil and gas prices are high, our sales for firewood soar. During times when the prices are more moderate, only the die hard folks that love using wood heat, continue to buy.

Our mill uses all the different forms that the log can take. Firewood, sawdust and bark mulch are the by products from the lumber mill. If you have a sawmill or lumber mill near you, check with them for the availability of firewood. It might be sold as slab wood or split wood, depending on the equipment they use. In any event, if you need wood to burn for heating...
your home, you will be glad to find a nearby source.

When a severe winter comes along, home heating oil and even natural gas can become scarce as demand increases. If you have a wood burning stove or a fireplace in good working condition you can stay warm with wood heat. At times, we have heated our whole house with wood heat. And just as often we are lazy and busy and rely more on the oil burner. However, we have the wood stove ready to go, and keep a supply of wood near the back door. Many will keep a small supply of wood for emergencies, such as power outages and large winter storms. Even if you have oil or gas heat, having a backup plan using wood heat is a good plan.

**When to Buy Firewood**

If you are reading this during the winter, you may have trouble sourcing firewood, depending on your location. In our area, the firewood dealers are usually sold out by the time extreme cold weather sets in. In addition, delivery can be next to impossible once your street is covered in snow and ice.

Our recommendation to our customers is to buy during the summer, stack the wood and let it dry. You might want to try the Holzhausen method of wood stacking. Make buying the firewood part of your winter preparedness system. Buying months ahead of when you will need it, allows the wood to season, making it easier to start a fire. As my father in law always said, “all wood will burn”. It just depends on how much time you want to spend starting the fire!
Foraging for Wood

If you have permission to forage scraps and limbs from a property, that can be a good way to collect firewood for free. Maybe you have an area of trees on your own property. Gathering fallen limbs, dead trees and kindling could be a source of firewood right out your back door. Remember the old saying “he who chops his own wood is twice warmed”? It’s still true today. And it can be a fun family activity during a snowy afternoon.
Fire Starters

Kindling, alone, often needs something even drier or more combustible to help it catch fire. There are some easily obtained items that can help the fires get started.
Newspaper. We have one newspaper delivered to our door still. It’s not that we can’t get the news any other way, it’s that having some newspaper around comes in handy. We use it crumpled up under the kindling to start a fire. We also keep newspaper for animal cage lining, eating Chesapeake Bay blue crabs, and of course reading the news. Newspaper is also a great insulator and can help keep foods warm or cold as needed.

Pine Cones and citrus peels are items you can find or save from the household and later use for fire starters. Both will release pleasant aromas while the fire burns!
Fat wood is the resin filled wood from pine trees. It is usually cut into thin sticks. Instead of cutting pine specifically for the center fat wood, consider foraging for dead pine trees or stumps left behind from a cutting. You might want to try making char cloth for a fire starting alternative to matches.

**Setting Up the Fire in a Wood Burning Stove**

Clean the wood stove regularly and maintain it in good condition.

Make sure the chimney flue is open.

Clear out an over abundance of ash. Some ash will help the fire burn better from the start but too much can smother the kindling and fire starters. Collect the ashes in a metal pail and store far from any combustible structure. When cooled completely, the ashes can be added to the chicken’s dust bath for a healthy addition of toxin removing dust. Ash can also be added to the garden, used as an ice melt on your sidewalk or driveway, and in the barn to repel flies.

Crumple newspaper, break up fat wood pieces or lay down fire starter of your choice. Place a few pieces of kindling on top of the fire starters. Light the fire from the bottom. Control the air flow to the fire by adjusting the vents.

Add more fire starters and kindling as needed to get the fire going.

Begin adding smaller pieces of firewood.

Once the fire is going well, add a larger piece of firewood, adjust the vents for less air, and enjoy the fire.

Here’s another method of setting up the firebox in a wood burning stove.
stove, called the top down method.
Using Wood Heat
Simple Tips for Staying Warm
Using Wood Heat Cautions

When using wood heat in your home, you may notice that your nasal passages and throat can be dry and uncomfortable. Increase the humidity in your home by placing a cast iron pot on the top of the wood stove or anywhere near the stove. This additional moisture being released into the air will help with dryness. If you have an electric humidifier or vaporizer, that can be a good assist with dry air too.

Using fire in the home always increases risk. Make sure that children are kept away from the fireplace, or wood stove at all times. Check the area around and under the wood stove for toys or items that may have found their way to a dangerous spot. Keep combustible items far back from the hearth area. Keep the stove maintained in good working order.

Other Means of Staying Warmer While Using Wood Heat

You might find that your wood stove or fireplace only heats a smaller area. Try these ideas for keeping the heat in the areas you need to live in.

Check windows and doors for drafts. Apply weather stripping to keep the heat in the house.

Close off unused rooms.

Clear furniture from in front of heat vents when using the oil burner or heat pump.

Close drapes to further insulate the window.

Wear layers of clothing. Don’t forget the socks. And a hat really does keep your whole body warmer.
Using wood heat responsibly is a good way to heat your home. Foraging for the wood can keep the cost down and provide you with wood if you run out or forget to order. Plus the action of chopping your own firewood is great physical activity during the cold winter months.

How are you weathering the winter weather this year? Do you use alternate forms of heating your home?