

Misc

# Wood Heat: Is It Right For Your Maintenance Facility?

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Earlier this year there was a cost-of-heating discussion on the NoerNet. In summary, the combined cold weather and the cost of fuel had some folks asking how far they could turn down the thermostat. An alternative to turning down the thermostat is to supplemental heat with wood. Burning wood provides BTUs, but in addition there is an added incentive to improve golf course grounds by removal of hazardous or diseased trees, weedy trees, trees that are encroaching in play areas, or trees that are shading turf in play areas. Additionally, that stack of shipping pallets will

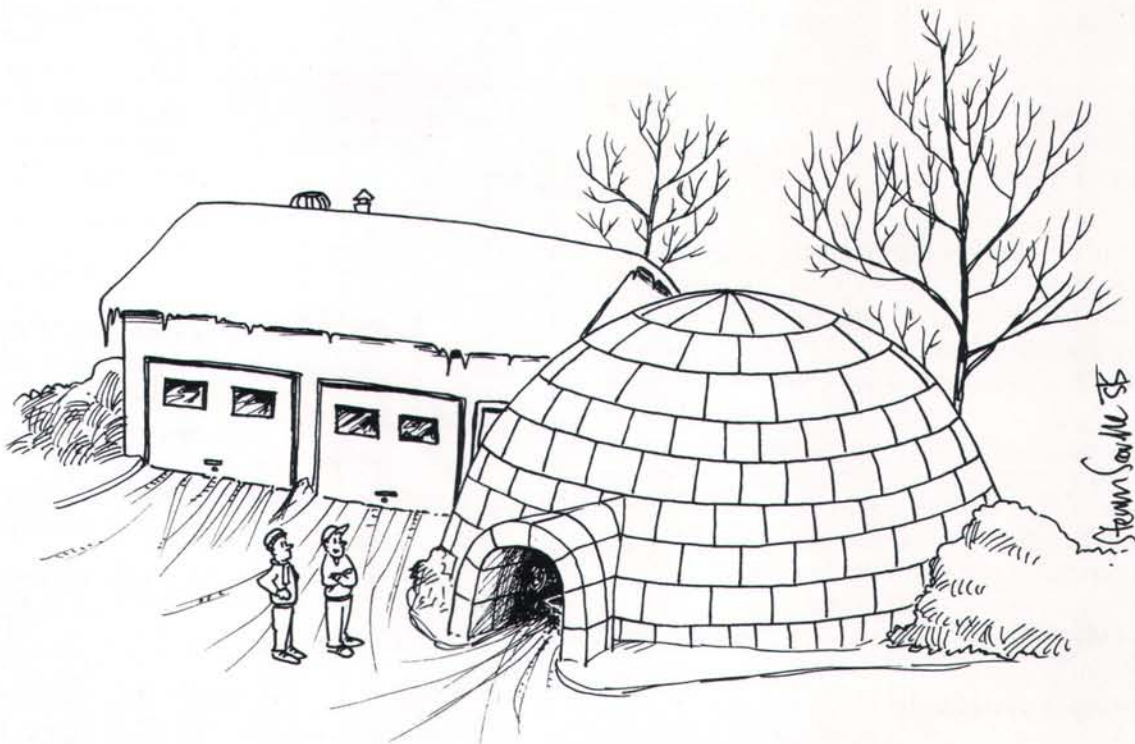
burn quite nicely.

Since the early 1970s my total home heat has been wood. I'll share here experiences with wood stoves and handling wood. You can use the information to decide if (supplemental) wood heat is right for you.

In 1978 I moved to a larger house. The 12 gauge steel wood stove from the old house moved also, but soon proved to be too small. It was replaced by a wood furnace that has these features: cost - \$1,000, weight - 600 pounds, lots of fire brick and cast iron to raise combustion temperatures, 110,000 BTU output per hour, and

a six cubic foot fire chamber capacity. A fan circulates heated air through hot air and return ducts, and most importantly the furnace has secondary combustion, a second air supply that increases efficiency and also burns gases and particles not burned by the primary air supply. A class A chimney is required. Although insurance premiums were not affected, I did have to file a description with my agent. You can find equivalent stoves and stoves with many other features on the Internet.

Labor, including cutting wood, is approximately 40 hours annual-



"IT NEARLY **DOUBLES** OUR AVAILABLE SHOP FLOOR SPACE. OF COURSE, THERE MAY BE SOME TROUBLE IN THE SPRING...."



ly. I add wood three times a day in cold weather, two times a day if it is in the 30s and sunny. You do get smoke and water vapor when you add wood, but in an hour the combustion chamber is hot and chimney smoke is barely detectable. If you keep the fire hot the stove and chimney stay amazingly clean. In a burning season there is less than

1/4" of creosote build-up, so I don't routinely clean the chimney. In August the heating season's creosote sloughs from the chimney tile and can be removed from the clean-out door.

You can visualize the amount of wood burned in a season different ways. Annually it is three ranks 16' X 5" X 18 inches, or five trees with

a 16" stump. Weekly the amount is a heaped 4' X 3' X 32" wood box.

Store wood in two areas: one area for seasoned and ready to burn wood, and one area for storing newly cut wood. It's handy to switch the areas each year.

For their wood supply, old timers sought out hardwoods, but their houses generally had poor insulation and their stoves were not too efficient. Hickory does not burn and soon fills my stove with charcoal, and oak is too hot for all but the coldest weather. My favorite woods are boxelder and popular as both produce a clean, hot fire. Generally, trees cut after the leaves emerge in the spring make a hot burning fire, and the wood is clean because the bark comes off when the wood is split.

With lightweight chain saws and hydraulic splitters, the physical labor of cutting firewood is not as hard as it used to be. And with modern stoves, larger pieces of wood burn cleaner and more efficiently. I split wood to 4-6 inches, and an occasional crooked or knotty piece is burned at 8-10 inches. ♣

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