

# Why do we heat with wood?

*Saving money is part of it, but there is much more to like about a wood fire*

By John Gulland



*The author with his firewood 'kit'. Photo by Wendy Milne*

Because it is February, you might be getting fed up lugging firewood around and feeding a wood heater's endless appetite for fuel. Sure, we save some money each year by not having to buy electricity, oil or propane for home heating. But there must be something more causing us to put in all this labour. Having earned my living as a wood heat specialist for most of my working life, I have given this matter some careful thought and have come up with some reasons.

In a world of touch-screen convenience, pocket-sized computers, and automatic climate-controlled environments, wood heating is in every way rough, basic and steadfastly hands-on. People who heat with wood seem out of step with the modern world swirling around them. Have wood burners and those who labour to supply them with fuel slipped through a crack in the cozy consensus of modernity? Or are they onto something meaningful that has been missed by the mainstream?

The producers and consumers of fuelwood are engaged in an activity that reduces net greenhouse gas emissions while others merely

fret about global warming. The fuelwood fraternity use a renewable energy resource, taking pressure off dwindling supplies of ever-pricier and scarce fossil fuels. Buyers of fuelwood create jobs close to home and strengthen their local communities. They know more about the cause-and-effect relationships of energy production and consumption than economists who promote tar sands development.

Heating with wood is about a lot more than home heating. It is a tangible expression of self-reliance, of the courage to buck the trends and to resist the appeal of sedentary, push-button convenience. Heating with wood reinforces links to the land and is a willing submission to the cycle of the seasons. It provides stability and security in a turbulent world.

To its owner, the woodlot is a living community in constant evolution, while to the urban observer it may be seen as a museum in which the removal of a tree exhibit renders it diminished. The woodlot owner watches its quality improve over the years, even as it yields products and creates employment. The owner's

household earns part of its income by being a fuel supplier to the neighbours. It is a gentle way to produce energy compared to open pit uranium mines and oil and gas fracking operations.

Fuelwood is the ultimate populist energy resource, the most easily accessed and affordable of all renewable energies. The major environmental impact of wood heating is visible for all to see in the form of smoke emissions, making everyone who uses it instantly accountable for their actions. The families that heat with wood and those that supply them with fuel do so privately, without fanfare or acknowledgement. Heating with wood is its own reward.

The low profile of wood heating in energy policy discussions and in the media reflects the fact that policy – even rural policy – is developed in big cities, and that the large media outlets are all urban in location and outlook. That and the fact that no large corporations are involved in wood heating and therefore no high-priced lobbyists or special interest groups prowl the halls of legislatures pleading the case of wood burning. So, despite the fact that plenty of families burn wood at home, its role as an energy source rarely appears on government and media radar. Many of us are happy to see it stay that way.

A real wood fire satisfies like no imitation can. Each fire is unique, following its random path from lit kindling to dramatic flames to red

coals. The soft glow of the fire creates a memorable setting for intimate conversation. It's the place where family and friends gather. Gazing into the fire in a quiet moment, your imagination is free to soar on flights of fancy or probe the depths of the soul.

A wood burning stove or heating fireplace bathes the room with a rich, soothing warmth that no other energy source can equal. The fire's radiance offers a welcome embrace as you come in from the cold. With its all-natural ingredients, a wood fire is a hearty tonic for winter chill.



*A view through the glass door of an efficient wood stove. Photo by John Gulland*

When you warm your life with wood, you participate in a natural cycle and an ancient human ritual. The simple act of stirring coals and placing a log on the fire is one we share with ancestors who lived at the dawn of human history.

Burning wood for warmth is still satisfying. True, it takes a little extra effort, but like tending a garden or home cooking a meal, you are always rewarded.

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*For more information please visit [woodheat.org](http://woodheat.org)*