

SEASONED STACKS?



Winter is all about logs – chopping, stacking and burning. Check that your firewood is adequately seasoned with a moisture meter.

Damp firewood is not only bad for your fire and the environment, it's about to be outlawed.

So how do you check that your logs are dry enough to burn efficiently?

Firewood must be dried properly in order to burn cleanly. For most of us, this means stacking and drying the wood.

When wood is freshly cut in winter, the moisture content can be up to 50%. The amount of moisture affects the calorific value, or amount of heat emitted. Put simply, the moisture in logs burns off as steam before the wood will burn, which reduces the useful heat emitted by the log. The moisture content should be less than 20%.

Wood density also affects the calorific value of timber: Hard woods, such as ash, oak or birch, for example, are denser than soft woods – evergreen conifers. Denser wood burns for longer than soft wood, while soft wood burns fast, brightly and hot.

SPLIT

Split wood dries more quickly than round wood, because a split log has a larger surface area, which will allow moisture to evaporate more efficiently. Some owners prefer to split long lengths of cordwood, while others cross-cut logs to a usable size and split them before stacking. It's an entirely personal choice.

STACK

Stacks will depend on how you harvest your logs and how much space is available to stack it. A good log stack must allow air to circulate so that moisture in the logs can evaporate



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efficiently. Protection from rain and snow is not vital, but it is important to put the stack on risers to keep the bottom layer off the ground. Birch, willow and even hornbeam will rot quickly if left in contact with the ground.

STORE

Trees vary in their density, so different species have different drying times. A good rule of thumb is at least a year for well-stacked, air-dried split wood, but two years' seasoning is more likely to result in really dry logs. Then simply use a moisture meter to check that the moisture content is less than 20%.

STOCK – ROTATE IT

To get the most out of all your firewood, it's important to rotate your log supplies. The ideal log store has a couple of compartments, each able to hold supplies for one winter. Be disciplined about where you stack new supplies.

Thanks to Zevak (www.zevak.co.uk) and Stovesonline (www.stovesonline.co.uk) for supplying test units.



From left to right: Stihl, Brennenstuhl, Stovesonline, Tack, Zevek, Proster

BRENNENSTUHL Moisture Detector MD	PROSTER Digital Wood Moisture Meter	TACK WM01 Classic LCD Damp Meter	STIHL Wood Moisture Meter	ZEVEK Moisture Meter	STOVESONLINE 2.0 Moisture Meter
£17.54 *	£14.99 *	£11.99 *	£18.40 *	£12.97 *	£19.68 *
141g	200g	127g	50g	50g	50g
9-volt battery (not supplied)	9-volt battery (supplied)	3 x AAA batteries (supplied)	4 x LR44 (supplied)	4 x LR44 (supplied)	4 x LR44 (supplied)
Backlit LCD display	LCD display (no backlight)	LCD display & backlight switch	Backlit LCD display	Backlit LCD display	Backlit LCD display
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold switch to record reading. 2. Auto-off after 3 minutes. 3. Solid unit. 4. Large display and beeps when ready. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Settings for different species of wood, marked on the unit. 2. Three buttons - simple to use. 3. Solid unit - less likely to mislay it. 4. Large display with hold function. 5. Auto-off - but only after 15 minutes. 6. 18-month warranty. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Useful backlight option on big display. 2. Buttons are not intuitive - must scroll through options. 3. Sensitive calibration for four different hardnesses - would be helpful to print types on the unit. 4. 24-month warranty. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prong cap retained with loop and wrist strap. 2. Handy pocket size. 3. Bright orange - hi-vis. 4. Auto-off after 15 seconds. 5. Screwdriver needed to access battery compartment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Handy pocket size. 2. Auto-off after 15 seconds. 3. Easy to use. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Handy pocket size. 2. Auto-off after 15 seconds. 3. Easy to use.
<i>*All prices are approximate, and vary from retailer to retailer.</i>	<i>All units show the air temperature and can be used to test building materials in addition to timber. Readings between the six units on the same log varied by 1-2%.</i>		<i>Stihl, Stoves and Zevek are essentially the same item, with tiny badging differences. The units are the same, with the same operating system. The only real difference is that Stihl has a retaining strap for the prong guard and requires a screwdriver to install the batteries.</i>		