THE FIREWOOD FIELD GUIDE

MASTERING THE HIGHLANDS HEARTH

Not all timber is created equal. Throwing the wrong wood into your stove can cause dangerous creosote buildup, while the right selection will hold a bed of coals until dawn. Use this field guide to select the right fuel for the right burn.



THE HARDWOODS: OVERNIGHT SUSTAINMENT

Hardwoods are dense and slow-burning. They are the engine of your woodstove, designed to emit steady BTUs and hold hot coals through the winter night.

◌ Sugar Maple (The Gold Standard):

Heavy, dense, and difficult to split if left too long. Maple provides exceptional heat and leaves a robust bed of coals.

◌ Red Oak (The Marathoner):

Requires significant patience to season—often taking a full year to dry properly—but rewards you with a massive BTU output and a fire that holds until morning.

◌ White Ash (The All-Rounder):

The workhorse of the Highlands woodpile. It splits beautifully, burns cleanly, and generates excellent heat with a steady, predictable flame.

◌ Ironwood (The Furnace):

The densest wood in the Highlands. It requires immense effort to split but burns longer and hotter than anything else on the woodpile. Reserve these for the 10 p.m. final load.

◌ Yellow Birch (The Starter):

Highly flammable bark makes it incredibly easy to light. It burns slightly faster than maple but provides an excellent, steady heat.

THE SOFTWOODS: QUICK HEAT & KINDLING

Softwoods ignite rapidly and burn fiercely. They are perfect for bringing a cold stove up to operating temperature, but rely on them for overnight heat and you will wake up freezing.

◌ White Pine (The Flash):

Splits effortlessly and catches instantly. Pine is strictly for kindling. Burning large amounts of pine at low temperatures creates dangerous creosote buildup in your chimney.

◌ Balsam Fir (The Fragrance):

Ignites fast and hot, flooding the room with that classic cottage-country scent. It is excellent for starting a stubborn fire, but prone to throwing heavy sparks.

◌ Spruce (The Sprinter):

A common Canadian Shield conifer that catches quickly to warm up a cold masonry flue. It crackles heavily and creates significant ash, so use it sparingly to get the draft pulling before adding hardwood.

◌ Cedar (The Crackler):

Smells incredible and splits into perfect kindling shards. Warning: Cedar pops and sparks aggressively. Never leave a cedar fire unattended in an open masonry fireplace without the screen closed.

◌ Poplar (The Filler):

- A low-density wood that burns fast and leaves very little ash. Good for a quick shoulder-season fire on a damp September morning when you don't need a deep coal bed.

HEARTH & HOME DEFENSE

A well kept stove is an asset, but it is not a replacement for structural stewardship.

◌ The 15°C Standby Baseline:

Never rely solely on the woodstove to protect your pipes during the Unattended Gap. Maintain your baseline furnace heat at 15°C so the property remains protected after the fire dies.

◌ The Perimeter Woodpile:

Never stack your main winter cord directly against the cottage siding. It creates an insulated bridge for carpenter ants and a winter nesting ground for mice. Stack the bulk supply away from the foundation, and only stage the weekend's fuel on the covered porch.

◌ The Cold Draft Seal:

Before heading back to the city, ensure the fire is completely out and the damper is tightly closed. An open flue acts as a vacuum, pulling your 15°C baseline heat straight up the chimney and forcing your furnace to run constantly while you are away.

◌ The Ash Bed Rule:

Do not sweep the firebox spotless. Leaving a 1-inch bed of ash insulates the bottom of the stove, helping your coals burn hotter and last longer into the morning.

◌ The Creosote Check:

Inspect your stovepipe often. If tapping the pipe sounds dull and heavy rather than a crisp metallic ping, it is time to schedule a professional chimney sweep. Don't rely on a store bought log to keep your family safe.

THE WARM ARRIVAL PROTOCOL

If arriving in the dark to a freezing cottage and a damp woodpile isn't your idea of a weekend at the lake, there is a second option.

Step 1

The Remote Property Profile

- **The Action:** Complete our onboarding questionnaire. We build a customized, fixed-scope stewardship plan based on your property needs.
- **The Benefit**: Data-driven pricing without wasting your weekend waiting for contractors to do an on-site walkthrough.

Step 2

The Off-Season Staging

- **The Action**: During our routine property checks, we secure the Unattended Gap. We can adjust the smart thermostat to your arrival preference, turn on the porch lights, and stage dry hardwood directly by the hearth.
- **The Benefit**: Absolute peace of mind while you are in the city, knowing the property is actively defended.

Step 3

Spring-Ready Waterfront

- **The Action**: You unlock the door. The cottage is 21°C. The lights are on, and the fire is ready to be lit.
- **The Benefit**: You reclaim your time. You drop your bags, strike a match, and the weekend begins immediately.

Info

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