

Your Masonry Fireplace

Recommended information for a safer & more enjoyable hearth experience.

Have Your Fireplace Cleaned. Have your fireplace inspected and cleaned annually by a National Chimney Sweep Guild Certified chimney sweep. A dirty fireplace can cause chimney fires or contribute to air pollution. Your local NCSG-certified chimney sweep will diagnose your fireplace and recommend what it needs in order to burn cleanly and safely.

Choose the right fuel. In general, hardwood firewood (oak, pecan, hickory, ash, etc.) burns cleaner than softwood firewood (fir, pine, cedar, etc.). Independent tests (conducted by Shelton Research Labs, Santa Fe, NM) have proven that manufactured fire logs burn much cleaner than firewood. Use seasoned wood, wood with a moisture content of less than 20 percent, burns much cleaner than green (high moisture content) wood. Check with your cordwood supplier to make sure that the wood you purchase is seasoned.

Burn Wisely. Good fireplace habits can decrease fuel consumption in the home while maintaining the same level of warmth. Make sure the fire gets enough air to burn properly. Close the damper when the fire is out to keep warm room air inside. Minimize creosote buildup, which causes chimney fires. Creosote is the black tarry or flaky substance formed in chimneys during the wood burning process. While firewood leaves flammable creosote and carbon deposits on chimney wells, tests show fire logs leave significantly less creosote accumulation than wood.

Make a fire that fits your fireplace. A fire that's too large or too hot not only wastes fuel, it can crack your chimney.

Keep your fireplace in good working condition. If you notice any cracks in the chimney, and any loose mortar or brick, have your chimney repaired. Have the chimney liner inspected for cracking or deterioration. Read and follow the label when using fire logs. Use one fire log at a time, starting it with a fireplace at room temperature. Don't poke or break manufactured logs. This will cause them to crack apart, releasing their energy at a high rate and resulting in a shorter burn time. Fire logs perform best when burned on a supporting fireplace grate with a maximum of three to four inches of space between support bars. If your fireplace is equipped with glass doors, leave them open while burning a fire log to allow proper draught and cleaner burning. Once you're sure the fire is extinguished, close the damper and glass doors to retain warm air inside the house. We are not condoning or knocking manufactured logs. There is a correct and incorrect way to use them.

Fire Prevention Tips. Being good to the environment also means making sure your fireplace habits are safe and will not pose a danger to your home or your neighborhood. Remember: Clear the area around the fireplace and chimney. Debris too close to the fireplace could cause a fire. Check the flue for obstructions like birds' nests, and trim any overhanging branches or large trees near the chimney. Always use a fireplace screen. Never overload the fireplace with too many logs. Don't use the fireplace as an incinerator, and never burn garbage, Christmas trees, or piles of paper. Keep a fire extinguisher on hand and place smoke detectors throughout the house. Test the smoke detectors and batteries regularly. See that the extinguisher is in good working order and that all family members know how to operate it. When building a fire, place logs at the rear of the fireplace, preferably on a grate. Never leave fire unattended. Be sure the fire is extinguished before you go to bed. Keep wood stacked, covered, and out-of-doors, away from the house and off the ground. Bring in only as much as you need for one evening to prevent insects that may be in the wood from entering your home. Manufactured Fire logs, which are packaged to eliminate insects and mess, can also prevent this problem.

Have your fireplace inspected annually and cleaned when necessary by a chimney sweep certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America. A dirty fireplace can cause chimney fires and inhibit proper venting of smoke up the flue.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)