

Have your fireplace and chimney cleaned once a year



By Samantha Mazzotta

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As we move into November and cold weather sets in, it's time for a reminder about lighting a fire in your fireplace safely and successfully. (If you own a gas-lit fireplace, skip Steps 3 and 5.)

1. Open the damper and visually inspect the firebox and flue to ensure that they are clear.
2. Stack firewood in the center of the fireplace, being careful not to place the logs too close together. The wood stack should take up no more than one-third of the space in the fireplace.
3. Place loosely rolled newspaper in the gaps created by the wood stack, on all three sides. (Use newspaper only — avoid magazines or color inserts.)
4. Preheat the flue. Carefully light a rolled piece of newspaper and hold the paper about 2 inches inside the flue. Move the paper in slow circles for 10 to 30 seconds. This will encourage warm air to flow up and out the chimney.
5. Light the newspaper between the logs, on all three sides. A good-size flame should leap up

shortly, but will die down as the last of the paper burns. Look for smaller flames flickering along the bottom of the logs; this shows that the wood has caught, and that a nice, small- to medium-size fire will build in a few minutes.

6. Add wood to the fire one piece at a time. To maintain the fire's size, add one new log for each log that burns away. To increase its size, add one log every five minutes or so to a steady fire, and note the amount of flames and heat after each addition.

The most complicated part of fire-building, for new users, is finding the right amount of kindling to get a steady fire going. Dry twigs and wood chips can be added to newspaper; leaves don't burn as well and are better left on the mulch pile.

Use a combination of woods for the best results: oak burns slowly and cleanly, while pine ignites more easily and burns hotter, but is consumed quickly.

Enjoy your fireplace, with a dose of common sense: Don't burn trash in it, keep the gate closed and have the fireplace and chimney cleaned once a year.

Home Tip: Leave about 1 inch of fine ash in the bottom of the fireplace. The ash insulates the firebox and helps the fireplace heat more efficiently.

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