

Cutting firewood on your property

This article explains the best practices forest owners should use to choose and remove firewood from their forests.

Which tree is good for firewood and which should be left standing? Most forest owners do not know how to decide. Sadly, many fine trees are cut up for firewood only because they were easy to fell with a chainsaw. The leaners and crooked trees are left behind to reproduce, reducing timber quality across New York. With better trees harder to find, timber industry jobs could be lost. It all starts with the decisions of private forest owners.

Best management practices for cutting firewood

Remove firewood trees based on a written plan.

Invite a professional, reputable forester to cruise your woodlot and provide you with an inventory and plan. Generally speaking, forest plans include an inventory of timber, maps, descriptions of stand quality, and a schedule of activities to improve the condition of the forest to meet the owner's goals. The plan will identify which trees are to be removed due to poor quality. These trees are called "culls." Cull trees suitable for burning (ash, hard maple, oak, hickory, cherry, beech) should be the only trees removed for firewood. Other trees like aspen, pine, and soft maple may be cut down, but they do not make good firewood.

If you have developed your own plan, follow it and encourage your neighbors to use good judgment when selecting trees for firewood.

Mark trees that are planned to remain standing.

In some silvicultural practices, certain trees are selected as residual or crop trees. These trees will remain standing and growing for the long-term. If you have trees that will remain, mark them with paint or flagging to make the job of thinning easier and more efficient. Cut away the appropriate unmarked trees, leaving some for seedling protection and cutting up others for firewood.

Use directional felling to avoid damaging other trees.

Directional felling is the process of determining the direction a given tree will fall and making cuts to actually steer the tree as it falls. A "felling hinge" is the hallmark of a good directional cut. It is a safe, efficient, and satisfying way to cut a tree down. Residual trees should not be damaged during woodland saw work. These residual trees are your future timber and wildlife habitat. If you are not sure of how to bring down a leaner, learn.

Improve your chainsaw skills.

Chainsaws cannot cut logs by themselves; they need to be under the control of a skilled cutter. Most chainsaw users are not as skilled as they could be. This leads to poor

selection of trees to be cut (see above), damage to other trees in the forest, and worst of all, serious bodily injury. Ask about classes at local chainsaw stores, through the NY Logger Training Program, through the NY Forest Owners Association, or through the national Game of Logging program for forest owners. Each class will give you more information to make good cuts, not bad decisions.

Leave some trees downed to protect seedlings from deer.

Fallen trees form barriers to deer, yet allow seedlings to grow vigorously. Avoid the temptation to "clean up" the woodland floor of branches and wind throws. Ice storm damage and trees intentionally felled to protect seedlings are especially helpful in this regard. By obstructing even small areas of deer browsing, woodlot diversity will improve.

Remove firewood logs from the forest to avoid insect infestation.

A pile of logs in a forest can be a target for infestation by wood-boring insects. By removing wood from the forest, you will decrease the likelihood of infestation. Nuisance pests like ants and centipedes can be brought inside all too easily. If you have hardwood or log construction in your home, trying to control wood boring insects is difficult and expensive. Better to prevent these kinds of problems by taking the firewood logs out of the forest environment.

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