



Wood as a Domestic Fuel

With rising oil prices the comparative cost of burning firewood has become more competitive. For the small woodland owner wishing to make use of their own resource and improve their wood at the same time, firewood can be a worthwhile option. Woodland owners can fell up to 5 cubic metres of timber every three months without needing a felling licence from the Forestry Commission, if it is for their own use. The important thing is to plan ahead. Think how much wood you burn each year and aim to cut and process that amount a year ahead. There are firewood processors commercially available for domestic use and can be a less backbreaking way to split your firewood.



Firewood will burn far better if harvested in the Autumn or Winter split and stacked, allowed to dry and season for at least 6 months, depending on the species of tree. In a small wood of two or three hectares much of the material produced by thinning or coppicing will be suitable for firewood but little for anything else. A broadleaved wood will add between 4 and 6 tonnes per hectare each year as the trees grow, this is known as the 'Annual Increment'. So a woodland owner can safely remove this amount without depleting the resource.

While providing yourself with wood fuel it is possible by judicious selection of stems to combine two of the most important management techniques in the production of high quality timber. They are thinning and selection for quality. When thinning, select for potential quality trees

that will have straight branch free stems and an even crown. Remember that most woods have survived because they were a useful and fuel has historically been the main use. It is far better to thin out living trees for fuel than to rely on dead wood, which is a

valuable part of the woodland habitat.

Be aware that chainsaws are potentially dangerous, life-threatening machines and also trees do not always fall where you plan - so get training or employ a trained contractor to do the cutting for you. If you need help in deciding which trees to fell then the project can assist by selecting and marking the trees for you, but we do charge for our time!

The Chiltern Woodlands Project is a registered charity. Our aim is to promote and encourage the sensitive and sustainable management of woods in the Chiltern Hills in order to conserve the landscape and wildlife of the area. We offer advice and assistance to owners of small, unmanaged woods. We also organise a series of training courses and woodland events. We publish this newsletter three times a year, please contact us if you would like to be sent copies in future.

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