

From firewood to high-quality veneer

In Your Backyard Woods

Trees provide us with a wide array of wood products. Early settlers built their homes and furniture from trees in their woods. While you might not be quite so ambitious, you can harvest trees from your woods to provide income, or to use directly in your home.



Dennis Haugen

Goods From the Woods

Firewood, fence posts, sawlogs, and veneer logs are all examples of products that can come from a woodlot of any size.

Firewood—Trees that are dead, crooked, infested with pests, or are crowding out preferred trees are good candidates for the firewood pile. For a long-lasting fire, cut denser broad-leaf trees such as oak, hickory, ash, beech, maple, and birch.



Tom Millton, University of MN Extension Service

Stack firewood in a sunny, well-drained location 30 feet or more from your house. Cover your pile to keep out rain and snow.

Fence Posts—In general, it's best to use preservative-treated posts for your projects; however, some tree species naturally resist decay and will make long-lasting posts. Osage-orange, black locust, cedar, cypress, redwood, and white oak are good choices for posts.

Sawlogs—Straight trees larger than 12 inches in diameter can produce lumber. These trees often are referred to as sawtimber and may contain one or more sawlogs. A sawmill can turn these sawlogs into boards.



Roger Bergmeier

If you need rough sawn lumber for a do-it-yourself project, you can often contract with a portable sawmill operator. A portable mill can be brought right to your woods to saw the logs into boards.

Veneer—Veneer is a thin sheet of wood that is peeled or sliced from large, straight trees that typically have diameters greater than 20 inches. A veneer-quality broad-leaf tree would have the first 9 feet of the trunk completely free of limbs, branch stubs, wounds, and other defects. Black walnut, sugar maple, and black cherry are all trees prized for their veneer.

Annual growth on U.S. commercial forest land is almost one-and-one-half times the harvest and mortality caused by fire, insects and disease, and other natural causes. Not only are forests growing more wood than we are removing, but the growth of wood is powered by environmentally friendly solar energy. Also, the manufacture of wood products requires significantly less fossil-fuel energy consumption than does the manufacture of substitute products from nonrenewable sources such as steel, plastic, and aluminum.

Other Products—Do-it-yourself projects such as rustic “roundwood” furniture, “pole barns,” and trail bridges can often be fashioned from trees cut in backyard woods. Also, local markets often exist for certain wood products. For example, trees for cabin logs are in demand for log homes in selected areas. If you have a paper mill nearby, both broad-leaf and needle-leaf trees may be marketable as pulpwood.



Tom Milton, University of MN Extension

Did You Know . . . ?

Each year, Americans use more than 600 pounds of paper apiece, plus the lumber equivalent of a 100-foot tall tree.



Harlan Petersen, University of MN Extension

Marketing Your Products

If you own just a few acres, consider working with neighbors to jointly market your products. When selling timber, seek help from a professional forester who can assist you (and your neighbors) in determining the quantity, quality, and value of products in your woods.

In the Forest

Owners of large forests, similar to owners of small forests, harvest trees for a range of products such as firewood, posts and poles, lumber and paper products, and veneer. With a trend of declining harvests on public forest lands, demand for forest products from private lands is increasing to keep up with America’s wood consumption. Owners of well-managed forests employ professional foresters to market products and monitor harvests.



Dennis Haugen

This pile of 32-foot logs would supply 250 Americans with their paper and lumber needs for one year.

Family Activity: Finding Firewood

Include your family when deciding which trees should be cut for firewood. Explain that trees contain energy, which is released as heat when wood burns. Ask what was the original source of the energy that produced the wood (the sun). By using wood for some of your energy, you are deciding to reduce your use of nonrenewable oil, coal, and natural gas. Trees are a renewable (can grow again) energy source; oil, coal, and natural gas are not.

You'll need:

- Brightly colored yarn or flagging tape (available from a forestry supply catalog)
- Flexible tape measure
- Marker

Distribute some brightly colored yarn or flagging tape. Ask the children to help you find trees that measure about 6 to 8 inches in diameter that you may cut down for firewood. (See the earlier description of firewood.) Measure the diameter of trees by making a diameter tape. Take a regular flexible tape measure and make a mark every 3.14 inches (the first mark is "1," the second "2," and so on). Use these marks to measure tree diameter. Place the tape measure around a tree at a height about 4½ feet above the ground. If the tree measures between the "6" and "8" marks that you made on the tape, then the diameter is 6 to 8 inches and the tree would make a good firewood candidate. Mark firewood candidates with flagging tape.

Many people will harvest only fallen trees for firewood. While this saves the complicated step of cutting down a tree, it's not always the best idea for the health of your woods. Decaying trees produce nutrients for remaining plants and trees, and animals need a lot of space, including horizontal space. Still, you may want to consider using some downed wood for firewood.

Finish the day by reading from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, especially where he describes cutting an old oak for firewood. Such readings can help a child discover his or her own love of the land.

"Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it stands to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Aldo Leopold