

Installing a wood burner

Contributed by sean

This is a brief introduction; my aim is to give some of the reasons for installing a woodburning/multi-fuel stove, and an idea of the economics of running one.

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Why a woodburner?

The reasons for installing a woodburner can be divided into four main groups:

Aesthetic: they look nice, particularly modern large-windowed designs, which give a generous view of the fire.

Functional: they heat up your house with phenomenal efficiency. An open fire in a draughty house can actually make the room it's in colder; with a stove the vast majority of the heat is channelled into the house, rather than up the chimney. To give a personal example, we have a fairly small 5kW stove which we almost never run flat out. During the winter the only radiator turned on in our house (Victorian terrace, 4 beds, 3 recep to give an idea of size) is the one in the bathroom.

Larger stoves can provide domestic hot water and central heating (which you may find unnecessary). Modern designs allow for retro-fitting of a boiler if your circumstances change.

Environmental: burning wood is good for the environment. Contemporary stove designs operate at 70-80% efficiency, and can be used in smoke control areas. Most can be fitted with a catalytic cleaner, and some, such as Clearview, burn so efficiently that even this is unnecessary.

Most importantly, burning wood for domestic fuel is, at worst estimate carbon dioxide neutral, and in all likelihood (with modern stove designs) actually a net remover of greenhouse gas. It also encourages efficient management and controlled harvesting of broad-leaved deciduous woodland.

Entertainment: watching a fire burn is entertainment in its own right. Once you have a woodburner a whole world of building logpiles, making recycled paper logs, and playing around with axes and saws opens up before you. Seriously, if you want to start chainsawing logs etc., get training and proper protective clothing. For normal domestic use though, a hatchet, lump hammer and bow-saw are all you need.

Installation costs

In my experience the expensive bit is getting your chimney lined. This cost us the thick end of £1000, but we do have a tall house. In a detached house you might find it cheaper to vent through an outside wall, rather than line the chimney. You could also save money by doing it yourself. If you go the DIY route, make sure that you check on building regulations, because you're storing up trouble for the future if you don't.

Stoves vary enormously in price and can also be bought second-hand. My only advice is to remember that this almost certainly a one-off purchase, so it is worth going with the best you can afford.

Special 'Stove Gauntlets' are expensive, and in my experience can be happily replaced with a thick pair of gardening gauntlets, at about £6 from your local hardware store.

Running costs

The only figures I have for this are personal; hopefully they will give people an idea of ball-park figures.

You will need to get your chimney swept once a year, probably £20-40 depending on your area. Again you can do this yourself, but you may run into difficulties with the terms of guarantees.

Wood is going to be your major cost. We use about 1.5 loads of wood over the course over the course of a winter. Buying it pre-sawn into 10" lengths this costs £180 including delivery. This price is for seasoned timber. If you have the space for larger loads and the room to season your own fuel, then the costs come down. If you're really lucky you can grow your own as well.

Fuel costs can also be kept down by making your own papier maché logs, either using a metal log-maker which is widely available for about £30, or by following the link at the end of this article.

Links

Stove manufacturers: www.charnwood.com and www.clearviewstoves.com

Building regulations: www.odpm.gov.uk

Paper log making: www.two3five.com

Emission figures: www.thecarbontrust.co.uk