



MR SWEEP CHIMNEYS & STOVES

BURNING WOOD THE RIGHT WAY

The Staffordshire Homeowner's Guide to Cleaner,

Safer & More Efficient Log Burning

**How to choose your fuel, operate your stove correctly
and avoid common mistakes**

07380 805 327

Serving Staffordshire & surrounding areas

WELCOME TO MR SWEEP

A wood-burning stove can provide warmth, comfort and a wonderful focal point for your home.

But getting the best from a log burner isn't simply a case of putting wood into the stove and lighting it.

The type of wood you burn, how dry it is, how you light the fire, how you operate the air controls and how well the chimney is maintained can all make a significant difference.

Burning wood correctly can help your stove operate more effectively while reducing unnecessary smoke and deposits.

This guide has been produced by **Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves** to help homeowners across Staffordshire understand how to burn wood responsibly.

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1. WHY THE WAY YOU BURN WOOD MATTERS

A stove is designed to burn fuel in a particular way.

When operated correctly, combustion should be hot and controlled.

When operated badly, the fire may produce more smoke and unwanted combustion products.

Poor operation can include:

- Burning wet wood.
- Burning unsuitable materials.
- Starving the fire of air.
- Overloading the stove.
- Constantly running the appliance at very low output.
- Using fuel that isn't approved for the appliance.
- Ignoring the manufacturer's operating instructions.

The result can be reduced performance, more smoke and increased deposits within the appliance and chimney.

The simple principle

Good fuel + good airflow + correct operation + a maintained chimney = a better-burning stove.

2. WHAT MAKES GOOD FIREWOOD?

Good firewood should be:

- Suitable for domestic burning.
- Properly dried.
- Stored correctly.
- Free from paint and chemicals.
- Appropriate for your appliance.
- The correct size for your stove.

The most important factor is moisture content.

3. UNDERSTANDING MOISTURE CONTENT

Wood naturally contains water.

Freshly cut timber can contain a substantial amount of moisture.

Burning it before it has dried sufficiently means some of the energy produced by the fire is effectively being used to evaporate that water.

This can result in:

- Lower useful heat.
- More smoke.

- Poorer combustion.
- Increased deposits.
- Dirtier stove glass.
- Greater potential for chimney problems.

The 20% figure

For domestic firewood sold in England in quantities below 2 cubic metres, the applicable **Ready to Burn** rules require the wood to have a moisture content of 20% or less. A moisture meter can help you check the logs you're using.

MR SWEEP TIP

Split a log and test the freshly exposed surface rather than relying only on the outside appearance of the log.

4. BUYING FIREWOOD

Buy your logs from a reputable supplier.

Ask questions if you are unsure.

You should know:

- What type of wood you're buying.
- Whether it is seasoned or kiln-dried.
- Its approximate moisture content.
- Whether it is intended for domestic burning.
- How it should be stored.

Be cautious about cheap or mystery firewood

A cheap load isn't necessarily a bargain if the wood is too wet or unsuitable.

Wet logs can give you less useful heat while potentially contributing to more smoke and deposits.

Look for reputable suppliers

Where applicable, look for the **Ready to Burn** certification mark.

5. STORING YOUR LOGS

Once you have purchased good firewood, you need to keep it dry.

Your log store should ideally:

- Keep rain off the logs.
- Allow plenty of air movement.
- Keep logs off the ground.
- Prevent excessive moisture build-up.
- Allow the logs to remain ventilated.

Don't wrap everything in plastic

Completely enclosing logs can restrict airflow and trap moisture.

A good log store is designed to protect the wood while still allowing ventilation.

Think:

DRY + AIRFLOW

6. WHICH TYPES OF WOOD CAN YOU BURN?

Many species of untreated, properly dried wood can be suitable for wood-burning appliances.

Examples include:

- Oak.
- Ash.
- Beech.
- Birch.
- Hawthorn.
- Hazel.
- Sycamore.
- Maple.

Different woods have different characteristics.

Some burn faster.

Some burn more slowly.

Some are easier to split.

Some can provide longer-lasting fires.

However, the most important consideration isn't simply the species.

Dryness matters.

A properly dried piece of suitable wood is generally preferable to wet wood of a species that is otherwise considered excellent firewood.

7. WHAT YOU SHOULD NEVER BURN

Your stove should never be used to dispose of household waste.

Never burn:

- Plastic.
- Household rubbish.
- Painted timber.
- Treated timber.
- MDF.
- Chipboard.
- Laminated wood.
- Furniture.
- Varnished timber.
- Timber containing preservatives.
- Materials containing adhesives.
- Materials contaminated with chemicals.
- Unknown waste wood.

Why?

These materials can release undesirable or harmful substances when burned.

They can also contribute to deposits and damage within the stove and chimney.

MR SWEEP RULE

If you wouldn't put it on a campfire, that doesn't mean it belongs in your stove.

More importantly:

If you don't know exactly what it is or whether it is approved for your appliance, don't burn it.

8. THE PROBLEM WITH WET WOOD

Wet wood is one of the biggest causes of poor stove performance.

A wet log may:

- Hiss or steam.
- Be difficult to ignite.
- Produce excessive smoke.
- Leave your stove glass dirty.
- Produce less useful heat.
- Contribute to deposits in the flue.

If your stove regularly produces a lot of visible smoke, take a closer look at your fuel and operating technique.

9. LIGHTING YOUR STOVE

Follow your manufacturer's instructions first.

Every stove is slightly different.

A common approach with modern wood-burning stoves is to establish a hot fire quickly rather than allowing the appliance to sit smouldering.

Before lighting

Check:

- The stove is in good condition.
- The chimney is appropriately maintained.
- The fuel is dry and suitable.
- Your carbon monoxide alarm is working.
- The stove door closes properly.
- The glass is intact.

Starting the fire

Use:

- Dry kindling.
- Appropriate firelighters.
- Suitable dry logs.

Avoid using petrol, paraffin or other inappropriate accelerants.

Allow the fire to establish properly.

10. THE BEST WAY TO OPERATE YOUR FIRE

Your stove needs air to burn.

When you first light the appliance, it generally needs sufficient air to establish a good fire. Once it reaches its normal operating temperature, the air controls can be adjusted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Don't rush to close the air controls

One common mistake is closing the air supply too quickly because the homeowner wants the logs to last longer.

This can cause the fire to burn poorly.

Your goal should be:

Efficient combustion — not maximum smouldering time.

11. AIR CONTROLS EXPLAINED

Modern stoves may have one or more air controls.

Depending on the appliance, these can control different stages of combustion.

Your stove may have:

- Primary air.
- Secondary air.
- Tertiary air.
- An airwash system.

The terminology and design varies between manufacturers.

Why does air matter?

The fire needs oxygen.

Too little air can result in poor combustion.

Too much air can cause the stove to burn excessively quickly.

The aim is to operate within the range recommended by the manufacturer.

Always read your stove manual.

It is the best source of information for your particular appliance.

12. RELOADING YOUR STOVE

When adding more logs, avoid simply throwing a large amount of wood onto a weak or dying fire.

A good established fire should generally be present before reloading.

Follow your manufacturer's instructions regarding:

- Log size.
- Number of logs.
- Maximum fuel load.
- Positioning.
- Air settings.

Open the door carefully

When opening a stove door, do so according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Opening the door slowly can help reduce the possibility of smoke escaping into the room.

13. AVOIDING EXCESSIVE SMOKE

A properly operated modern stove should not normally be producing excessive visible smoke continuously.

If you see excessive smoke, consider:

Is the wood dry?

Wet wood is a common cause.

Is the fire hot enough?

A weak, smouldering fire may produce more smoke.

Is there enough air?

The fire may be starved of oxygen.

Is the chimney drawing correctly?

Poor draw can have several possible causes.

Is the appliance overloaded?

Too much fuel can interfere with proper combustion.

If you've tried the appropriate operating adjustments and the problem continues, seek professional advice.

14. WHY YOUR CHIMNEY GETS DIRTY

Even a correctly operated stove produces combustion products.

Some deposits will accumulate over time.

However, poor fuel and poor operation can increase the amount of unwanted material produced.

Potential contributors include:

- Wet wood.
- Excessive smouldering.
- Poor airflow.
- Burning unsuitable materials.
- Poor chimney conditions.
- Infrequent sweeping.

Your chimney needs maintenance

Regular chimney sweeping is an important part of responsible stove ownership.

15. SMOKE CONTROL AREAS

Smoke Control Areas exist to help control smoke emissions from domestic solid-fuel appliances.

The rules can affect:

- What fuels can be burned.
- Which appliances can be used.
- How appliances may be operated.

Important

Not every property in Staffordshire is subject to the same Smoke Control Area rules. You need to check the requirements for your specific property.

16. STAFFORDSHIRE & LOCAL RULES

Staffordshire contains different local authority areas, and Smoke Control Area arrangements can differ.

For example:

Stoke-on-Trent has Smoke Control Areas.

Other parts of Staffordshire have different arrangements.

This means that advice given to someone in one part of the county may not necessarily apply to a homeowner somewhere else.

MR SWEEP TIP

Check the rules for your own property — not simply the rules for Staffordshire generally.

If you're buying a new stove, this should be one of the things you investigate before making your purchase.

17. READY TO BURN FUEL

The **Ready to Burn** scheme applies to certain solid fuels sold for domestic burning.

For firewood sold in England in quantities below 2 cubic metres, the relevant requirements include a moisture content of no more than 20%.

When purchasing firewood, look for appropriate information from the supplier.

Remember

Buying "seasoned" wood doesn't automatically mean the wood is dry enough.

Measure it where appropriate.

18. HOW TO TELL IF YOUR FIRE IS BURNING WELL

There isn't one visual sign that can tell you everything, but there are useful indicators.

A well-operated stove should generally:

- Establish a proper fire.
- Produce useful heat.
- Burn suitable fuel effectively.
- Have appropriate airflow.
- Avoid prolonged heavy smoke.
- Operate within its intended temperature range.

Your chimney plume

A visible plume isn't automatically proof that something is wrong.

Weather conditions, temperature and the stage of combustion can all affect what you see.

However, persistent heavy smoke can be a sign that something needs attention.

Consider:

Fuel + Air + Temperature + Chimney

These four factors all matter.

19. COMMON STOVE-OWNER MISTAKES

Mistake 1 — Burning wet wood

Problem: Poor combustion and increased smoke.

Better approach: Use appropriately dry firewood.

Mistake 2 — Burning household waste

Problem: Potentially harmful emissions and unsuitable combustion.

Better approach: Dispose of waste through appropriate waste services.

Mistake 3 — Starving the fire

Problem: Smouldering and increased smoke.

Better approach: Operate the air controls according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Mistake 4 — Overloading the stove

Problem: Excessive heat and potential appliance damage.

Better approach: Follow the recommended fuel load.

Mistake 5 — Ignoring dirty glass

Problem: It can be an indication that the fire isn't burning cleanly, although some staining can occur normally.

Better approach: Check your fuel and operating technique.

Mistake 6 — Forgetting the chimney

Problem: Deposits and potential blockages can accumulate.

Better approach: Have the chimney swept at an appropriate interval.

Mistake 7 — Using the stove after a problem develops

Problem: A change in performance can indicate an underlying issue.

Better approach: Stop and seek appropriate professional advice.

20. CARBON MONOXIDE SAFETY

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can be produced by combustion appliances. It is particularly dangerous because you cannot see or smell it.

Every solid-fuel appliance needs proper safety consideration

Make sure you have an appropriate carbon monoxide alarm where required and recommended.

Check it regularly.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding:

- Position.
- Testing.
- Battery replacement.
- Replacement date.

If the alarm sounds

Treat it seriously.

Follow the alarm manufacturer's emergency instructions.

Get everyone to a safe place and seek appropriate assistance.

21. CHIMNEY SWEEPING

Your stove can only work as part of a properly maintained chimney and flue system.

Regular sweeping can help remove accumulated soot and deposits.

It can also provide an opportunity for obvious issues to be identified.

How often?

The appropriate frequency can depend on:

- Type of fuel.
- Frequency of use.
- Appliance.
- Chimney.
- Flue.
- Operating conditions.
- Manufacturer recommendations.
- Professional guidance.

If you use your stove regularly, discuss an appropriate sweeping interval with your chimney sweep.

MR SWEEP TIP

Put your chimney sweep in the diary before autumn arrives.

22. PREPARING FOR WINTER

Before the first really cold weather arrives, check everything.

STOVE

- Glass intact.
- Door working correctly.
- Door seal in good condition.
- Firebricks checked.
- Stove body checked.
- Manufacturer's instructions available.

CHIMNEY

- Sweep booked or completed.
- No known blockages.
- No unexplained changes in performance.

FUEL

- Suitable logs purchased.
- Moisture content checked.
- Logs stored correctly.

SAFETY

- Carbon monoxide alarm tested.
 - Smoke alarms tested.
 - Combustible items kept away from stove.
-

23. THE MR SWEEP WOOD-BURNING CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU LIGHT

- I am using suitable fuel.
- My logs are appropriately dry.
- The stove is in good condition.

The glass is intact.
The door closes correctly.
My carbon monoxide alarm is working.
My chimney is appropriately maintained.

WHILE BURNING

I am following the manufacturer's instructions.
The fire is burning properly.
I am not deliberately smouldering the fire.
I am not overloading the stove.
I am not burning rubbish.
I am using the correct air settings.

AFTER USE

The fire is allowed to go out safely.
The stove is allowed to cool.
The room remains properly ventilated as required.
Any unusual problem is noted.

24. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is kiln-dried wood always better than seasoned wood?

Not necessarily.

The important issue is whether the firewood is sufficiently dry and suitable for your appliance.

Both properly dried kiln-dried and naturally seasoned wood can be suitable.

Can I burn any type of untreated wood?

Not automatically.

The wood should be suitable for domestic burning and appropriate for your appliance.

Can I burn old fence panels?

Not unless you know that they are genuinely suitable and untreated.

Many fence panels and similar timber products can contain preservatives or other treatments.

Can I burn cardboard?

It's best not to use household waste as fuel.

Use the fuels recommended by your appliance manufacturer.

Why does my stove glass go black?

There can be several causes.

Possible factors include:

- Wet wood.
- Poor combustion.
- Insufficient airflow.
- Operating the stove too cool.

- Incorrect operation.
- Chimney or flue issues.

If the problem is persistent, investigate it rather than simply cleaning the glass repeatedly.

Why is my chimney producing lots of smoke?

Possible causes include:

- Wet fuel.
- Insufficient air.
- Poor combustion.
- Cold chimney.
- Poor draw.
- Incorrect operation.
- Appliance or flue problems.

If excessive smoke continues, seek professional advice.

How do I know whether my logs are dry?

A moisture meter is one of the easiest ways to check.

For firewood subject to the Ready to Burn rules, the relevant moisture threshold is 20% or less.

Can I leave my stove burning overnight?

Your stove should be operated according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Do not deliberately operate an appliance in a way that causes prolonged poor combustion simply to keep it burning for longer.

Does a chimney still need sweeping if I only use my stove occasionally?

The appropriate sweeping frequency depends on the circumstances.

Even occasional use can result in deposits, and a chimney can also become blocked by debris or nesting material.

Discuss your circumstances with your chimney sweep.

25. THE MR SWEEP GOLDEN RULES

1. BURN DRY WOOD

Check your fuel rather than guessing.

2. USE APPROPRIATE FUEL

Follow your stove manufacturer's instructions.

3. NEVER BURN HOUSEHOLD WASTE

A stove is not an incinerator.

4. KEEP THE FIRE HOT ENOUGH TO BURN PROPERLY

Don't deliberately create a smoky, smouldering fire.

5. DON'T OVERLOAD YOUR STOVE

More fuel doesn't necessarily mean more heat.

6. GIVE THE FIRE ENOUGH AIR

Follow your appliance instructions.

7. KEEP YOUR CHIMNEY MAINTAINED

Regular sweeping is part of responsible stove ownership.

8. CHECK YOUR CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM

Test it regularly.

9. KNOW YOUR LOCAL RULES

Smoke Control Area requirements can vary.

10. IF SOMETHING CHANGES, GET IT CHECKED

Don't ignore unusual smoke, smells, poor draw or changes in stove performance.

26. YOUR QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

THE PERFECT LOG-BURNING ROUTINE

STEP 1

Use suitable dry firewood.

STEP 2

Store it correctly.

STEP 3

Start your fire with dry kindling and appropriate firelighters.

STEP 4

Allow the fire to establish properly.

STEP 5

Operate the air controls according to the manufacturer's instructions.

STEP 6

Add an appropriate amount of fuel.

STEP 7

Avoid prolonged smoky or smouldering combustion.

STEP 8

Keep your chimney swept at an appropriate interval.

STEP 9

Check your carbon monoxide alarm.

STEP 10

Enjoy your stove responsibly.

A FINAL WORD FROM MR SWEEP

A wood-burning stove doesn't have to be complicated.

Once you understand the basics, good stove operation becomes second nature.

Use suitable dry wood.

Give the fire enough air.

Don't overload the appliance.

Don't burn household waste.

Keep your chimney maintained.

Know the rules that apply to your property.

And pay attention when something doesn't seem right.

A cleaner-burning stove is generally a happier stove — and good habits can help you get more enjoyment from it.

MR SWEEP CHIMNEYS & STOVES

PROFESSIONAL CHIMNEY SWEEPING

STAFFORDSHIRE & SURROUNDING AREAS

If you need your chimney swept, have concerns about your stove or chimney, or simply want advice about maintaining your appliance, **Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves** is here to help.

CLEAN CHIMNEY

SAFE STOVE

PEACE OF MIND

BOOK YOUR CHIMNEY SWEEP

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This guide is intended as general information for homeowners and should not be regarded as a substitute for professional advice, appliance manufacturer's instructions, Building Regulations, government guidance or local-authority requirements.

Rules concerning solid-fuel appliances, fuels and Smoke Control Areas can change and can vary according to the location of the property.

Always check the current requirements applying to your own property and appliance.

Where specialist inspection, testing, installation, repair or other professional work is required, seek advice from an appropriately qualified person.

Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves accepts no responsibility for decisions made solely on the basis of this general guide.

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