

Specialists spark hot tips on fireplaces

Students lucky enough to have a fireplace to cozy up to while studying for finals, can make that fireplace more energy efficient with a few modifications, according to UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension specialists.

"An important but often overlooked factor influencing fireplace efficiency is the choice of fuel," said Ardis Hutchins, extension housing specialist.

Hard woods, such as hickory, oak, ash and apple, burn longer and more steadily, producing more hours of heat. Softwoods, such as pine, ignite more readily, but produce less total heat per log, she explained.

"It's important to burn wood that has been thoroughly seasoned," she added.

According to tests conducted by the U.S. Forest Product Laboratory, it's possible to get as much as 44 percent more heat from a log by simply letting it air dry before burning.

"Turning down the thermostat and closing the door to the room where the fire is burning will also keep heat loss to a minimum," Hutchins said.

Homeowners are purchasing equipment for their fireplace to further increase heating efficiency. This equipment ranges from the more expensive air blowers to the popular tempered glass screens. The specialists said the following are among those items available:

Tubes or hollow grates can be placed in the fireplace to provide additional heat by air circulation. Some of these units rely on natural air flow, while others use a fan.

Heat-circulating units can be inserted into the present

firebox. These units draw heated air from the fire, upward to form a current by the underside of a V-shaped duct. The delay causes a transfer of heat energy that would otherwise go up the flue.

Tempered glass screens or tight-fitting glass doors greatly reduce the amount of heat loss up a chimney

while the damper is open and the fire is dying out. Greatest savings occur when the closed doors control the loss of heat overnight. A tight-fitting metal door or sheet of asbestos may be used.

Bypass dampers can be installed in the fireplace box to radiate heat from the fire back into the room. The

metal baffle, hung below the damper re-radiates heat back into the room.

"Those persons who use their fireplace on a regular basis should build a good, hot fire at least weekly to burn out deposits of soot and creosote in the chimney," according to Gerald Bodman, UNL extension engineer.

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