

## Firewood and Insects

Bulletin #5019

Most of the insects that travel into homes on firewood create only a minor nuisance. Many insects, including flies, mosquitoes, wasps and earwigs, overwinter in spaces in and under bark or logs. Some insect-like animals, such as sowbugs, millipedes and spiders also “hitchhike” a ride on firewood. These hitchhikers can include gypsy moth eggs; hatching larvae create a nuisance. Other insects infest firewood by living under the bark or boring into the wood. The trouble starts when the warmth of indoors signals that it is time to begin spring activities.



*Carpenter ant*

Carpenter ants are nocturnal and are seen in the daytime only when searching for food or water, or when a colony is overcrowded. Carpenter ants tunnel into wood to increase nesting space. The queen starts a new colony only in unsound, wet wood. Even though carpenter ants that come into homes in firewood are primarily nuisance pests, they may cause structural damage if a new nest or colony is located in the timbers of a home.

Beetles that infest living or freshly cut trees do not infest dead trees or dry wood. However, they can become a nuisance in homes when they emerge from the firewood. The ideal way to avoid these insects is to cut living hardwood trees in the fall or early spring when the insects are in the overwintering or inactive developmental stage. The insects are attracted primarily to the smell of freshly cut trees; therefore, trees cut in the summer are much more likely to be infested.

There are three families of destructive beetles that can enter homes on firewood. They are generally referred to as lyctid, anobiid and bostrichid powder post beetles. These insects may infest the structures of homes, wooden tool handles, furniture, etc., as well as firewood. Their presence is usually signaled by flour-like wood dust found below small holes in wood.



*Bark beetle*



*Powderpost beetle*

In general, firewood from dead trees is more likely to be infested with potentially destructive insects. Wood with the bark attached is also more attractive to wood-destroying insects and diseases. Many insects attack only wood with bark.

### Management

The sooner the firewood is split, the quicker it dries, and the less attractive it is to most insects. Wood not split or wood left outside without covering is likely to become infested. The best place to store firewood is the old-time woodshed. Wood should be kept off the ground and protected from rain or snow. Air movement through the wood pile aids in drying.

Poorly vented basements should not be used to store firewood, especially wood that is not seasoned and dried. Inadequately dried wood can become moldy, cause unpleasant odors and harbor insects.

Humidity released from the wood can also cause mold or rot on structural materials in the basement.

It is best to move no more than a two-week supply of firewood into the home at a time to reduce the chance of insects becoming active. This is especially true with firewood from dead trees. The wood box should be emptied and cleaned every two weeks.

A vapona strip can be placed in the firewood storage room to control emerging insects. Be sure to read and follow label directions before purchase and use.

## ***FIREWOOD SHOULD NOT BE TREATED WITH INSECTICIDES***

**When Using Pesticides  
ALWAYS FOLLOW  
LABEL DIRECTIONS!**

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**Where trade names are used, no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Cooperative Extension is implied.**