



Believe it or not, the secret to good campfire cooking doesn't start with great equipment or secret recipes, but lies simply with your ability to build a decent campfire. So, let's chat about choosing campfire wood a bit more...



A good campfire is the secret to campfire cooking. Image: Coleman

What makes good firewood?

The drier, the better! Scientifically speaking, wood is full of small tubes that transport water from the roots through the trunk and then into the branches. These tubes can hold water for weeks, sometimes months after the wood has been cut.

If the wood is still full of moisture (aka 'green'), it won't burn to its full potential. Energy from the fire will have to refocus on drying the wood first, wasting the heat and making the output far less efficient. Freshly cut, 'green' wood, generates more smoke and fumes while it burns and therefore, is a stronger pollutant than seasoned wood.

Wherever there are trees, there will always be older, fallen pieces of wood around so select these responsibly and avoid cutting fresh limbs. If the weather turns and there is only damp wood to be found, this differs from 'green' wood and despite the challenge, starting a fire with wet wood is still doable so check out this guide [here](#) for some useful tips.



The right wood = hot coals ready for some serious campfire cooking. Image: Ben Trewren

Looking for natural firewood

Whenever you're looking for firewood in Australia, it's going to depend ultimately on what is available in your local area. The key is to get your hands on some firewood that is not only dry but dense.

Wood available from state to state

Across Western Australia, Jarrah and Wandoo are the species of choice. In Tasmania, Brown Peppermint is considered the best, and in Queensland - Ironbark and Box are the preferred choices. The most popular and easiest to source throughout South Australia, Victoria and southern NSW, is River Red Gum.

Knowing the available species is only a small part of the adventure, as the selection also depends upon how you wish to use your campfire - warmth, cooking or both? Each species has its own burn rate, flame output, plus coal and ash generation. River Red Gum is an excellent slow burner and produces minimal flame which makes it ideal for cooking. Species such as Turpentine and White Stringybark also burn with very little flame but are more suited for use in a wood oven.



Availability of different species will differ across the states. Image: Coleman



Test what works for you

Finding firewood that's perfect for your needs can often be challenging – but never impossible! My recommendation is to try and test locally available firewood to see what works best for you. Alternatively, you could research what species are available in your area of adventure and then use resources such as [this one](#) to determine its suitability as firewood. Most important is to ascertain the legalities around collecting wood in the area you're visiting as some campgrounds, councils, shires and parks prohibit the collection of wood as it disrupts native vegetation and wildlife habitat.



A nice selection of wood ready for a campfire. Image: Ben Trewren

Purchasing man-made firewood

New to the firewood market is the introduction of man-made fire logs called Ekologs. Basically, Ekologs are manufactured from sawdust and shavings that have been mechanically compressed to form a solid log. By utilising waste material, man-made fire logs help to reduce unnecessary felling of plantation timber and the destruction of habitat for Australian fauna.

There are several benefits of Ekologs over natural firewood. Firstly, they can be safely used as a concentrated fuel source, and they contain less than 10% moisture, which results in more heat on a weight-for-weight basis. Man-made firewood is also very dense, which means you burn fewer logs to achieve the same output, and lastly, their compact size makes them easier to store and transport.

The concerns with Ekologs compared to natural firewood is that they come with a cost – you need to transport them to and from the supplier and they don't create significantly hot coals.



*Man-made firewood is an environmentally friendly and space saving option for campers.
Image: Ekologs*

How to select firewood

Having decided that natural firewood is what you're after, here are the best tips I can offer when selecting firewood:

- Try and pick (or chop) it to size so logs easily fit within the fireplace.
- Look for dark to grey coloured wood – this signifies that the wood is older and drier.
- Get a feel for the weight – this might take a bit of practise as ideally, you want it to feel dense for extended burn time but not heavy with moisture.
- Knock logs together and listen for a hollow sound and look for cracked ends – this means the wood is dry!
- Select wood with the bark pulling off or missing – bark needs moisture to adhere to the wood, this is also a good indication that it's dried out.





Safety first! Make sure you know what you're doing when cutting it up. Image: Ozpig Australia

Cutting wood

I just want to mention another safety note when sourcing firewood. If you plan on cutting fallen trees and/or chopping up your own firewood, ensure that you are familiar with how to use a chainsaw, wedge, sledgehammer or whatever else your tool of choice might be. These tools can become dangerous if not used correctly, and inattention can mean a nasty premature end to what should be a fantastic camping trip.



Learn how to properly use your tool of choice when cutting wood. Image: Coleman

Can I use railway sleepers?

Right across Australia, there are numerous abandoned railway tracks. Many people see the sleepers as an opportunity for easy, free and large quantities of firewood. However, it's important to realise that railway sleepers will likely be contaminated by grease, oil, herbicides and/or heavy metals.

The fumes given off when these products are burned can be toxic. Because of this, I'd recommend avoiding this type of wood for campfires.

So, now that you've got the basics for selecting wood down pat, you're next campfire is sure to be a roaring success!

What are your best tips for selecting the right wood for your fire?