

Are Fireplace Ashes Good for My Garden?

As the days turn colder, it's great to relax by a cheery fire. But then the question ultimately arises: what should I do with the ashes? How about adding them to the garden? Turns out, that is probably not a good idea.



Ashes from your fireplace do contain potassium which, along with nitrogen and phosphorus, are the “Big Three” major nutrients necessary for proper plant growth. But it is hard to know just how much potassium is in the ash. And what is the pH? Nutrient and pH values vary with the type of wood burned and the heat level of the fire. The hotter the burn temperature, the

more completely the wood burns, thus leaving more ash and less charcoal and wood behind. More ash = higher pH. There will also be a higher percentage of potassium and salt. Much of the firewood available in our area is a mix of oak and other trees, which has a salt content of about 18% along with a high pH of around 11.5! Most plants prefer a neutral pH of around 7. Further, azaleas and blueberries need a low pH and will not do well in alkaline soil. Fireplace ashes contain a lot of salt which is bad for most plants. With so many unknowns, ashes are more likely to cause long-term problems than to help. Consider the following:

Type of Wood	Available Potassium (K₂O)	Total Soluble Salts	pH*
	Percent		
Hickory	3.6	10	11.4
Mixture of hard- and softwoods	8.9	35	11.9
Elm	5.3	12	11.1
Oak	4.5	36	12.4
Mostly Oak	6.3	18	11.5
Average	6.0	22	11.6

*pH of a 1 percent solution of ashes in water.

Find out what your soil really needs with a soil test available through the OSU Extension Office. Soil samples can be left at the southwest door of the office in the black lock box. There are forms and soil bags in a tub on top of the lock box. The OSU Soil, Water and Forage Analytical Laboratory in Stillwater will do the testing. The test costs \$10 per sample and it generally takes 2-3 weeks

for the results to be mailed to you. The test results will show you the levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium as well as the overall pH of your sample. The lab will recommend the correct type and amount of fertilizer needed for your lawn or garden.

Detailed instructions and videos on how to get good soil samples and understanding your test results are available on the Tulsa Master Gardener's web site www.tulsamastergardeners.org. On the main web page choose the "*Lawn and Garden Help*" tab. From there, click on "*Soil*" and scroll down to the bottom of the page. Click on the "*Click for Soil Test Instructions*" tab.

You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center located at 4116 East 15th Street, or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.

References/Sources:

OSU Cooperative Extension Service Fact Sheet [PSS-2238](#)

"Fireplace Ashes Can Harm Gardens", Tulsa World, November 8, 2020

