MANHATTAN, Kan. — When the temperatures drop, many people’s favorite way of generating warmth is a nice, wood-fueled fire. Most do not think twice about what wood they throw on the fire.

However, says Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham, not all firewoods are created equal.

Upham notes the greater the dry weight of trees, the greater heat value they have – creating stronger, longer-lasting fires.

“The highest [heat] value for trees commonly found in Kansas is Osage orange (hedgeball tree),” he said.

Osage orange, however, tends to create sparks when burning, so it is not ideal for an open fireplace, Upham said.

Black locust trees have the second highest heat value, and can produce a nice bed of coals. “However,” Upham said, “this tree produces suckers that can produce new trees next to the original. Take this into consideration if you choose to plant this tree.”

After black locust, red and bur oak have decent heat values but are slow growers. Mulberry and silver oak trees have a slightly lesser heat value but grow fairly quick.

All these trees, except for black locust, are available from the Kansas Forest Service and can be ordered online.
Planning Your Plantation

After you have chosen your tree species, then comes the actual planting. Wayne Geyer, a late Kansas State professor of forestry, conducted several studies over 35 years on how to best plant a woody plantation. Some key findings include:

- Plant on close spacing, 4-6 feet apart. This maximizes yield and reduces side branching.
- Control weeds the first 2 years.
- Harvest every 5 years, for those that can be harvested. Most trees will resprout and can then be re-harvested.
- Plant about 1 acre per year for 5 years. This can supply the majority of firewood to heat your home.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local extension office.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas Forest Service conservation trees (order form), https://www.kansasforests.org/conservation_trees


K-State Research and Extension local offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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