

Cutting Wood

With fuel costs soaring in recent years, many homeowners have turned to wood burning stoves for supplemental heating. This especially makes sense for those living in wooded areas where they can harvest their own firewood. But before you start swinging an axe, here are some pointers for selecting and caring for a wood cutting axe.

First, consider the "fit" of the axe to both you and the job. Select an axe of a length, weight, and handle material that you can handle comfortably and control the swing. There are numerous types of axes, so you will want to be sure you choose the appropriate type of axe for the job.

Before using any axe, make sure that the cutting edge is sharp and rust-free and the axe head is securely fastened to the handle. Likewise, don't use the axe if the handle is cracked or split. Wear safety glasses when chopping and make sure that you can grip the handle tightly and firmly. Be sure that you have sufficient clearance for your swing with no overhead obstacles in the way. Practice your swing by chopping a log laying horizontally on level ground.

Begin your swing by spreading your hands on the handle as you lift the axe overhead, sliding your top hand almost to the axe head. Hold the axe head so that it will strike the log at approximately a 45-degree angle. Turn slightly in the direction of your upper hand (right or left).

Follow through with a smooth, even swing. Turn to face forward as the axe head reaches the high point of the arc. Slide your hands back together at the handle grip as you complete the down stroke. Strike first with the heel (bottom corner of the blade) for deeper penetration. Let your momentum and the weight of the axe do most of the work. Follow through by pulling the axe toward you to achieve maximum impact. Free an axe head that has become wedged in the log by lifting up on the end of the handle. Repeat the procedure making minor adjustments if necessary until you feel comfortable.

Once you've practiced your swing a few times, you'll be chopping through that woodpile like a pro and enjoying the warmth of your woodstove on those cold snowy nights.