

Using Wood Ash in the Garden



Wood ash is an excellent fertilizer for garden soil. It includes potassium, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sulfur, and trace amounts of iron, aluminum, manganese, zinc, and boron—all trace minerals plants need. The addition of wood ash will slightly increase the pH of the soil, which on Cape Cod is a usually a good thing.

Be sure that the wood ash is the result of burning *untreated* wood. Ash from woodburning stoves, firepits, and backyard burn piles are all good sources. Small chunks of charcoal can be included too. Be sure that the ash doesn't contain nails or screws. Some people sift the ash, but there's no need to do so.

Having a soil test done can help you determine your soil's pH and identify any minerals your soil may be lacking. If a test has revealed that your soil is in the optimal pH range of 6.0 to 7.0, you can add up to 20 pounds (or one 5-gallon pail) of ashes per 1,000 square feet.

It's best spread the ashes over your garden beds in the spring as you're preparing to plant. But if you forget, you can spread the ashes on the soil surface later. Use a mask to limit inhaling the ash and choose a day without a lot of wind. Because the ash is fairly alkaline, you should wear gloves to protect your hands.

You can add wood ash to your compost pile as well and get its benefits as you spread your compost in the spring.

What NOT to Use Wood Ash On

Because it will raise the soil's pH, keep wood ash away from the following plants:

- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Blackberries
- Azaleas
- Rhododendrons
- Any other acid-loving plant

Also, don't use wood ash on new seedlings as the salts can be damaging.