

Wood Deck Firepit - Dos and Don'ts

Putting a firepit on your deck need not be a scary proposition. It just has to be installed correctly and safely. Then operated properly to add a cozy ambiance to any backyard activity—gatherings, entertaining, or peaceful family affairs.



Courtesy: pinterest.co.uk

Types Of Firepits

There are three firepit options to consider for a deck firepit.

- **Wood-burning.** Most popular choice. Many options are available. Also can be used to burn coal, charcoal, or pellets.
- **Propane.** Operates like a gas barbecue.
- **Natural Gas.** Gas lines must be professionally installed. Expensive unless installed during house construction.

Firepits advertised as electric feature an electric start but use propane or natural gas for fuel.

Firepit Do's

Open fires always add warmth and pleasure to backyard gatherings but open fires also have an element of danger that has to be considered.

Fire and Building Codes

Adhere to local building codes when installing a firepit. Some areas do not allow wood-burning pits at all. Or they may allow a firepit if the deck is constructed of non-flammable material like concrete. They may permit propane or natural gas-fired units on wooden decks. Contravening local fire codes can lead to fines of up to \$5000.00 and even jail time.

Insurance

You must inform most insurance companies when you install wood-burning appliances like firepits or wood stoves. Failure to do so often results in claims being denied and canceled insurance policies. Be prepared for your premiums to increase—possibly as much as 15%.

Location

Locate the firepit at least 10 feet from flammable material—like your house, furniture, trees, and plants. Ensure nothing overhangs the pit—like branches, umbrellas, awnings, or flammable patio covers. Close to the edge of the deck is the best option—but not so close that it can be easily knocked off.

Weight

Depending on the model and construction materials, some firepits weigh well over 200 pounds—concentrated on a fairly small area. People gather around fires—increasing the concentration of weight. Make sure the deck framing will hold the weight without sagging or collapsing. Consult a [joist span table](#) for load information. Ensure the existing joists are sound.

Deck Protection

Wood ignites when the temperature reaches about 500 degrees F. Wood decks must be shielded from sparks and radiant heat. Firepit mats are available from retail outlets and online.

Using concrete pavers or any non-flammable material ensures the safety of the deck below the firepit.

Ember mats provide extra protection to the deck around the pit. They are not thick enough to prevent radiant heat from reaching the deck but do stop burn marks to the wood from any embers that might escape from the pit.

Spark Screens

Firepit spark screens are available at most home improvement stores and online—in multiple sizes and configurations. They are manufactured of heavy-duty mesh that prevents sparks and embers from getting onto the deck. Many come complete with a hinged portion that allows you to add more fuel without removing the entire screen.

Clear the Area

Clear flammable materials—such as paper, leaves, napkins, dead grass, etc.—from around the firepit area before lighting the fire.

Fire Extinguisher

Be prepared. Fire can get out of control quickly. Keep a fire extinguisher, a pail of water or sand, a garden hose, or a fire blanket nearby. Make certain everyone around the firepit is aware of the precautions.

Follow Directions

All commercially available firepits come with user manuals covering assembly, operation, and safety. Make sure you are familiar with—and follow—all of the instructions.

Firepit Don'ts

Most firepit “don'ts” are related to firepit “do's. Don't ignore spark screens. Don't ignore fire codes. Don't ignore deck protection. Here are a few additional don'ts.

Fire Starter

Don't use fire starters like lighter fluid or gas. They are quick, easy, and dangerous. Too much can produce sheets of flame. Fluid leaked outside the pit may leave trails of flame across the deck. Start the fire with paper, kindling, and matches. Or use a barbecue lighter.

Fuel

Don't use sap or knot-filled wood. Spruce, fir, cedar, and hickory all provide the snap and crackle of burning wood—along with sparks and flying embers that can damage decks and upholstered furniture, start grass fires, and cause burns. Hardwoods like oak, birch, and maple burn well with less chance of sparks. They also create less smoke.

Weather

Don't light a fire in windy conditions—or if wind is forecast. Swirling flame, sparks, and embers travel a long distance and can char decking, burn holes in furniture, and start fires.

Unattended

Don't leave the firepit unattended when it is burning. A hot ember takes very little time to turn into fire if it reaches flammable material. Fire and alcohol are a poor mix. Ensure that the person in charge of the fire remains relatively sober during parties.

Extinguish and Cleanup

Don't ever leave the firepit without completely extinguishing the fire at the end of its use. Even if you think it is out, add water and stir well. When in doubt add more water. Sand works best in metal firepits. Water causes rust.

Once the ashes are completely cool (about 24 hours) clean the ashes out of the pit to prevent damage or corrosion if the ashes get wet.