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JUL 10 The Benefits of Eco Friendly Fireplaces and How to Choose One

energy, Green, green living, green products, guest, home

by Clay Miller

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"The smell of burning firewood and the molding of organic, earthy substances reminded her of jumping wildly into the enormous leaf piles of autumns past and she suddenly wished that it was appropriate for someone her age to do such a thing." — Abby Slovin, Letters In Cardboard Boxes.

Acting as the interlude between summer and winter, fall, the most beautiful season of the year marks the arrival of longer nights and shorter days; the beginning of football season in America; the harvesting season filled with orchard apples, pumpkin pies, rich spices, and many gatherings by a fireplace.

According to federal agencies that regulate energy and protect the environment the so common masonry fireplace found in many the homes in America is far from being considered the most efficient or natural source of heating. If you are in the market for a fireplace, the first step towards selecting the most eco-friendly fireplace for your home is to decide whether the fireplace will be used as the primary source of heating during the winter months or it will be just for decorative purposes.

Relatively inexpensive and easy to maintain, decorative fireplaces are great for people living in areas of milder winter or for people contemplating adding the look and feel of a fireplace to their homes since as the name says, decorative fireplaces, are not designed to provide much warmth. The most common types of decorative fireplaces are the ones using either bio-ethanol or gas log as fuel.

Bio-ethanol fireplaces use ethyl alcohol, a product derived from corn, as their main fuel. Such fireplaces tend to have a sleek, contemporary design. It is typically used in urban areas, especially in condos as they don't need to be vented.

Gas logs fireplaces operate by using natural gas or liquid propane as their main source of fuel. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which certifies heating appliances, existing fireplaces can be easily retrofitted into gas log ones as an more sustainable alternative to the traditional wood ones. Another great thing about gas logs fireplaces is that they can be vented or vent-free while providing a little more heat than the biofuel ones.

Moving from a decorative to a more permanent source of heating, we have the **pellet stove** and the **gas stove** fireplaces: While the first one use pellets that are mainly made from compressed sawdust, wood chips, bark, agricultural waste and other organic materials, the second one will use natural gas or liquid propane as their main source of fuel.

Although both systems require ventilation to be installed, I prefer pellet stoves over the gas ones given that a single load of pellets can last to up 24 hours. Another great advantage of having a pellet stove installed is its heating performance hence pellet stoves carry a much higher combustion and heating effectiveness than your ordinary wood stove. Because pellet stoves are self-contained units, they tend to produce very little air pollution which makes them the cleanest solid fuel-burning heating appliance for residential applications.

Similar to gas logs, **gas stoves** will also depend on natural gas or liquid propane to run. They tend to be very low maintenance and they also can be installed pretty much anywhere in the house. Ventilation for this type of heating system can be done either through the existing chimney or through the wall behind the stove."

Moving away from fossil burning components, there are the **electric fireplaces**. Providing zone heating for your home, while enhancing the interior design of your home, and growing as an eco-friendly option among many families, electric fireplaces are extremely easy to install, very safe, and require little to no maintenance when compared to fossil burning ones.

Absolutely safe and available in log inserts, free standing stoves, wall mount, built-in, plug-in, and rolling models, today's electric fireplaces can help you to save money on your heating bill without leaving you cold, since you don't need to set your thermostat high to heat the entire home when you only occupy one room. Because there are no gas emissions, no pollution, and no ventilation required, electric fireplaces are a great alternative for those suffering from asthma and other allergic reactions to wood burning.

VK Sustainable Concepts' Principal Andrea Volf, LEED AP ID+C, is a registered interior designer and sustainability professional with over fifteen years of experience in the interior design and marketing industries. Recently nominated by the Daily Herald Business Ledger as one of the Influential Women in Business 2012 and with articles published across US and Canada since 2009, Ms. Volf is an active member of the U.S. Green Building Council – Illinois Chapter, with in depth knowledge of all aspects of Sustainability – Social, Environmental and Economic. Ms. Volf is also one of the co-founders of NEW – Networking of Entrepreneurial Women – a networking group that is committed to supporting and promoting entrepreneurial women living and working in the Chicago suburban area. She also writes for [Northshore Fireplace](#).

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