

# FACT SHEET

# FIREPLACE INSERTS

*For people interested in enhancing the look and feel of an existing wood burning fireplace, the hearth industry has great news. It's now easier than ever before to increase the efficiency of a fireplace by adding a fireplace insert. The installation of a fireplace insert can turn an occasional source of warmth into a convenient and easy-to-use supplemental zone heater that can help control high home heating bills while protecting winter air quality.*

## Fireplace Insert Basics

Fireplace inserts are designed to enhance the operation and appearance of an existing wood burning fireplace, whether masonry or factory-built. Categorized primarily by the fuel burned for operation (natural gas, propane, EPA-certified wood, pellet and coal), a fireplace insert is installed into an existing wood burning fireplace. Fireplace inserts are made from cast iron or steel and have self-cleaning glass doors that allow the dancing flames of the fire to be viewed while the insulated doors remain closed, making the fire more efficient. Many manufacturers also augment the operation of fireplace inserts by offering state-of-the-art features such as fans and thermostatic controls (depending on the fuel).



## Enhanced Efficiency

Almost all North Americans with older wood burning fireplaces can benefit from the installation of a fireplace insert. Generally, older fireplaces have efficiency ratings of just five to ten percent. This low efficiency is due to the

open combustion design that allows an abundance of heated room air to be drawn into the fire, causing the fire to burn too fast and wasting energy. In contrast, a fireplace insert is an insulated, closed-door system that slows the fire down and increases the temperature of the fire to facilitate more complete combustion. This closed combustion system can assist in generating efficiencies of above 65 percent in many cases which can translate into more heat output. And, when it comes to burning wood, an EPA-certified wood burning fireplace insert can also reduce emissions from wood burning to almost zero.

## Variety of Fuel Options

Determining which fuel type to select when purchasing a fireplace insert depends on the cost and availability of the fuel, the desired efficiency and heat output, as well as the level of maintenance requirements and the desired appearance of the fire by the user. While most fireplace inserts manufactured today are extremely efficient, the choice is often dictated by a person's individual needs.

## Selecting a Fireplace Insert

Much like any other appliance, it is important to spend the time to choose a fireplace insert that fits your needs and your lifestyle, whether more formal or relaxed. Before making a final decision, visit a specialty retailer for experienced advice. A specialty retailer is a trained fireplace insert specialist. He or she can arrange for the safe and reliable installation of a fireplace insert by a certified professional installer. These experts are also the best source of information about how to correctly operate a fireplace insert, and can suggest a proper maintenance program.

For a list of specialty retailers, visit [www.hpba.org](http://www.hpba.org).

*Fireplace Insert Checklist on reverse side →*

# FIREPLACE INSERT CHECKLIST

*Information to consider when selecting a fireplace insert*

**☐ TYPE:** Fireplace inserts are distinguished by fuel. There are five different types: natural gas, propane, EPA-certified wood, pellet and coal.

**☐ SIZE:** There are many sizes of fireplace inserts, from small to extremely large. The key factor in selecting the size is based on the opening of the existing fireplace. To determine the right size, measure the following: opening height; opening width; opening depth (top and bottom); rear width and the depth of the hearth (area in front of fireplace).

**☐ LOCATION:** A fireplace insert needs to be placed in an existing masonry or factory-built fireplace with a working chimney.

**☐ VENTING:** Fireplace inserts are either vented naturally through a working chimney, direct vented or vent-free, depending on fuel choice. In most cases, a chimney liner is required. The type and size of the liner is specific to the fuel.

**☐ FEATURES:** Fireplace inserts are made from steel or cast iron and have self-cleaning glass doors to provide a view of the fire. Fireplace inserts may also have optional fans to distribute heat into a room, as well as thermostatic, or remote controls, to help regulate the fire automatically.

**☐ STYLE:** The style of fireplace inserts varies among fuel types. More information about individual fuel types can be obtained by reading the HPBA fact sheets on Wood Stoves, Gas Stoves and Pellet Stoves, as inserts are similar in construction to freestanding stoves. But, no matter what the fuel type, all fireplace inserts come in a variety of colors, finishes and designs, from modern to traditional.

**☐ INSTALLATION:** To ensure the safe and reliable installation of a fireplace insert, the HPBA recommends that people use a specialty retailer and a certified professional installer. In addition to assessing the construction of a house, the professional will obtain the necessary building permits and make sure that the installation meets all local and state codes. He or she will also ensure that the insert is as airtight as possible, using approved fireplace insulating materials, to make the fire easier to control and increase the heat output. In the case of gas, the professional installer will carefully adjust the fireplace to ensure the proper appearance of the flame.

**☐ MAINTENANCE:** The level of maintenance required for fireplace inserts depends on the chosen fuel type. A fireplace insert generally needs to be removed when the appliance is being maintained. But, no matter what type of fireplace insert is selected, the HPBA suggests that the chimney be inspected on an annual basis by a chimney sweep certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America.

**☐ FUEL REQUIREMENTS:** To see a complete list of fuel options for fireplace inserts, review the HPBA fact sheet on Hearth Product Fuels.

**☐ AVERAGE COST:** The price of the unit itself is only part of the total cost of owning a fireplace insert. Other requirements include installation, delivery, annual fuel costs and annual maintenance.

## COST CHECKLIST:

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fireplace Insert      | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chimney Liner         | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Installation/Delivery | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas or Fuel Line      | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Fuel Costs     | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Maintenance    | _____ |

## Fireplace Insert Benefits

- Increased fireplace efficiency.
- Clean, convenient and easy-to-use.
- Ideal secondary home heater helps save money.
- Cost-effective fuel consumption and multiple fuel options.
- Reduced fireplace emissions help protect winter air quality.
- Provides heat when the power goes out.

This information brought to you by this specialty retailer: