



Fireplace to Fertilizer

By: Sue Tanzi, UC Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

In Lake Tahoe we get asked all the time if it is safe to put your fireplace ash on your garden. The answer is Yes! Just be careful where you put it. Wood ash contains calcium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium and other trace minerals plants need to thrive. It raises the soil PH level to make it more acidic. Wood ash is alkaline. Lawns needing lime and potassium benefit from wood ash. Some of the plants that tolerate lime are: lavender, roses, citrus, stone fruit, onions, garlic, chives, lettuce and asparagus.

There are a few ways to use wood ash in the garden. Most importantly, make sure it is completely cool! Even warm coals can start a fire. One way is to add scoops to your compost pile and turn it regularly. For those of us who are impatient or need it now, you can sprinkle small amounts on desired area or mix wood ash with compost and spread over the desired area making sure to water it well so it doesn't blow around. The amount you use is 10-15 lbs per 1,000 sq feet (about what you would get from 1 cord of wood). You can break that down however you need to. You can apply at any time. Beware of over-application as it can cause a crust layer to form on your soil, especially if you apply it alone.

So get yourself a metal bucket or a popcorn tin and save those ashes! Happy garden and no dusty trash can. Whether or not it's organic depends on what you burn. You should always be burning untreated wood. Best of all it's free!