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Potash is an added bonus to heating your home with wood. As the name suggests, it contains potassium, wood ashes also have calcium and many trace elements that are needed in our mineral-deficient soils.

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Tennessee missed the last few glaciers. Our soils are very old and many of the minerals have leached out. We can remedy this situation by applying wood ashes.

I love wood heat. It warms me to my bones. There's nothing better when you come in from the cold than to be able to thaw out by a nice fire.

Wood is plentiful here. The logging industry leaves plenty of tops, so with a chainsaw, maul and pick-up truck, and a little labor, you can stay toasty warm all winter. Wood stoves are still common in rural communities.

A low-income family heating with wood will have a much warmer home than wealthier folks with gas or electric heat. The bigger and fancier the house is, the colder it will be. With thermostats set low, the wealthy wear sweaters while we are almost sweating because our homes are so warm.

Potassium is the K in NPK, but soil life does not like potassium chloride. Chlorine is deadly and kills the all important soil fungi. Wood ash is a much better way to add potassium.

Every week or so the ash bucket is filled when we clean out the build up in the stove. I set it outside for a few days to cool. Latent coals can remain combustible for a long while and can cause a fire to ignite if spread too soon.

I walk over the garden during winter and spread the ashes thinly. 10 pounds covering a 1000 square feet is a rate of 400 pounds to the acre, which is about right. So I fling a ten-foot-wide arch of ash from a full bucket over 100' length of the garden.

A tree's root goes deep into the ground and brings up minerals that are out of reach to herbaceous plants. Minerals are not lost by combustion. Wood ash is a premium fertilizer and greatly valued by gardeners.

Another value is in the charcoal. The black cinders in the ash bucket become safe homes for microbes in the soil. Biochar is the name now given this phenomena, where partially burnt wood is inoculated with compost and incorporated into the soil.

So, save those ashes and remineralize the soil. Pastures love it, and the gardens need it. by raising the soil pH, ashes help other elements become available, too. After you have sprinkled them on the frozen fields, come on in, throw a log on the fire and make some more great fertilizer.