



Boulder County  
Land Use Department  
Publications

## Disposing of Woody Material

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## Disposing of Woody Material

Traditionally, forest products have been used for a variety of purposes, such as building materials and as fuel for heating and cooking. Today, with modern standards of living, burn restrictions, and air quality issues, what was once seen as a commodity is now often a liability. How best to deal with unwanted woody biomass will depend on your properties location and personal preference.

When building in forested areas you need to consider what you are going to do with the woody biomass you will be generating as you create defensible space and healthier forests around your home. There are several ways you can deal with these materials. What you do and what method you use depends on several factors such as overall cost, size, amount, and location of the slash, and the final desired appearance of the landscape.

### Logs: Post and Poles and Dimensional Lumber

During cutting operations of any kind, the main trunks of trees are delimbed and cut up into logs of various lengths. Logs cut into lengths of 8-feet & 3-inches; 10-feet & 3-inches; 12-feet & 3-inches; or 16-feet & 3-inches can be utilized at their highest value as dimensional lumber, posts, or poles. There is not a huge market for small diameter logs created by many projects, however, the longer the log length the more options there are for utilization. If your logs are 6-inches in diameter or more, you might consider having the bark peeled and use them as structural supports for decks and overhangs. Please read the section about **Community Forestry Sort Yards** to learn about where residents can dispose of woody biomass free of charge.

### Firewood

One of the most common uses for tree trunks in Boulder County is as firewood. Use as firewood, from a wildfire mitigation perspective, is an acceptable practice as long as there is a safe and effective way to burn the wood and there isn't more firewood than can be used within a few years. Logs are typically cut up into 8-inch to 12-inch pieces, split, and stacked on-site. A small pile (less than ¼ of a cord) stacked near the house in the wintertime is acceptable as long as it is to be used in the immediate future. The main piles must be kept a minimum of 30-feet away from the house and other structures. Firewood must not be stacked near live trees, propane tanks, cisterns, utility poles, or other such improvements.

### Slash Disposal

As you create defensible space or manage your forest to make it healthier you will quickly accumulate a lot of branches and tops of trees that are too small to be used as firewood or dimensional lumber. This material is collectively known as slash and it represents one of the biggest obstacles to any successful forest management or wildfire mitigation operation. Proper disposal of slash is important in reducing the overall fire hazard and in controlling insects and disease in your forest. Removing slash has the added benefit of improving site aesthetics, aids in the development of grasses and shrubs, and improves access for people and wildlife.

### Four Common Methods of Slash Disposal:

#### Loading and Hauling

As the name implies, with this option cut woody biomass is loaded into trucks, trailers, or dumpsters and hauled to a legal drop-off site or to a landfill. The amount of slash generated from most lots make loading and hauling an expensive option for most people. It often requires a dumpster or the use of a large truck and trailer. Please read the section about **Community Forestry Sort Yards** to learn about where residents can dispose of woody material free of charge.

## Chipping

Chipping is an effective way of dealing with slash, provided that the amount of material is of small diameter and limited quantity. It is an expensive method, requiring heavy machinery, and is most practical on small, level sites with good access. Chipping is the preferred method of slash disposal for many forestry contractors and tree services who have the knowledge and ability to work with large powerful chipping machines and trucks. Individuals can also rent chippers and do the work themselves, but these machines are generally smaller and don't chip as large of a diameter material.

A chipper typically reduces materials into chips approximately one inch square by one-quarter inch thick. These chips decompose on the ground, provided there is enough available moisture, and they represent a very low fire hazard. They also serve as mulch to hold soil moisture and aid in plant development. Small quantities of chips have a pleasant appearance and allow easy movement through the area.

It is important when chipping to spread chips evenly over an area to keep them from accumulating to a depth of more than a few inches. Be careful not to pile chips too deep; they can stifle grass and flower development and can create an easy place for a fire to start. Do not spread chips as mulch around the foundation of your home or under decks.

## Lop and Scatter

This is the easiest and cheapest method of slash disposal, but is not practical in dense stands of trees where the effects of cutting and leaving materials on the ground increases wildfire hazard. It is most often used in open areas of mature trees with few smaller trees or undergrowth and poses little risk for wildland fire. Lop and scatter involves cutting trees and branches into small pieces and scattering them widely over an area. In typical forestry operations, it is desirable to cut pieces small enough so all the slash is within 12-inches of the ground, where it breaks down more readily and it doesn't inhibit walking or maneuvering of equipment.

## Building Slash Piles and Burning

Piling and burning is a quick way to eliminate a large amount of slash at moderate cost. This method is most practical for use in areas where access is limited, disturbance needs to be minimized, heavy machinery cannot maneuver (or is not allowed), or the cost of such mechanical operations is otherwise prohibitive. Generally, lots greater than one (1) acre in size can use this method effectively to dispose of slash. Forests should be low to moderately dense and have openings large enough to permit the piles to burn without starting nearby trees on fire.

Slash piles must be no more than 4-feet high and 6-feet in diameter and should be packed tightly to facilitate clean burning. Piles can be safely burned during times when snow cover is sufficient to prevent fire spread (generally, a minimum of 4-inches to 6-inches depth). Pile burning leaves a scorched fire ring that should be monitored to ensure noxious weeds don't colonize the disturbed area.

**Pile Burning requires a permit!** Contact the **Boulder County Public Health** (BCPH) Air Quality Program to obtain a permit. The following agencies must be notified for a Pile Burning.

1. Boulder County Public Health on the day of the burn (or on the following working day if the burn falls on the weekend).
2. Boulder County Communications at (303) 441-4444, on the day of the burn (before and after the burn).
3. Your local fire department at least three days prior to burn.

## Stumps

Stumps are extremely difficult to deal with. They are often large, unwieldy, and have rocks and gravel embedded in them, making chipping impossible.

Additionally, you cannot burn stumps in slash piles. At this time the best disposal option is to have them hauled away to a landfill.

## Community Forestry Sort Yards:

In response to the widespread bark beetle outbreak that began affecting Boulder County in 2007, the County has begun offering temporary Community Forestry Sort Yards where residents can dispose of woody biomass, free of charge. Sites are open throughout the summer at various mountain locations. All sized logs and slash will be accepted, but please no dirt, pine needles, bark or stumps.

Please visit Boulder County's Forest Health website at: [www.bouldercounty.org/foresthealth](http://www.bouldercounty.org/foresthealth) or call Land Use's front desk at 303-441-3930 for information on hours of operation, locations and materials accepted.

