

I'm a Lumberjack

Who says a blonde with a good manicure can't split her own firewood?

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I lived 33 years in the South

without thinking, *I need an ax.*

Where I'm from, fireplaces are decorative things, installed only for their mantels. If we lit a fire on the rare bitter night when the temperature plunged to (gasp!) 40 degrees, we used a bundle of shrink-wrapped logs from the supermarket.

But then I found myself in New England, in a drafty farmhouse with a stone fireplace the size of a Buick and a pile of logs to match. When winter struck, the wood lasted less than a month. Thus began my evolution: Out of blue-toed, shivering necessity, a lumberjack was born.

But there was a problem. I did not own an ax or a chainsaw. And I had certainly never swung a maul (an exquisitely useful cross between an ax and a sledgehammer). But what I lacked in experience, I more than made up for in determination.

When I went to the hardware store to buy my first maul, the elderly proprietor looked at my blond hair and red fingernails, then said skeptically, "Now, what would you want with that?" (It's true: the Neanderthal still exists and roams freely in central New England.)

I told him curtly, "To split wood." Honestly. What did he think I was going to say? *I'm planning to use it on my ex-husband's girlfriend?*

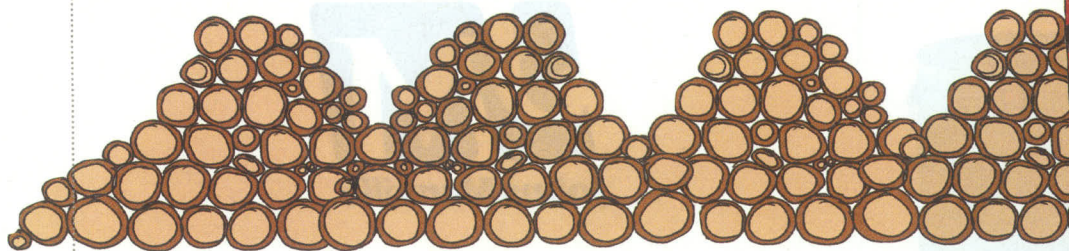
Ignoring the rube, I chose a sturdy 8-pounder, a sledgehammer and a selection of wedges. I must have looked pretty intense, because the shopowner looked frightened by the time I stalked out with my treasures slung over my shoulder.

Today I not only possess the right tools, I know how to use them. I have enough wood for a couple of winters, nicely seasoned and stacked a proper distance from the barn. I can operate a hydraulic log splitter and swing my maul like a war hammer.

My maul—there's a comforting phrase for a woman recently divorced. Who's gonna mess with a woman with a splitting maul?

As I look out on my woodpile from my kitchen window, I feel proud. It's so pretty, and represents so much to me, that I hate to disturb it. So for my first fire of the year, I bought a bundle of shrink-wrapped logs. 🌟

Jennifer Graham's next project involves a chainsaw and steel-toed boots. Follow her adventures at jennifergraham.com.



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