



Friends of the Muskoka Watershed
Science Driving Solutions

WOOD ASH DONATION FAQ

Thank you to all the amazing volunteers and ash donors who have contributed to the work of the Friends of the Muskoka Watershed and the betterment of our shared environment. Almost 2000 donations of home woodstove or fireplace ash have been made — a total contribution of over 30,000 kg of ash since 2019.

What are we doing with donated ash?

For the last six years, FOTMW has researched the benefits of adding wood ash to our local forests. The first thing we did with the ash donations was to test the ash chemical composition. The laboratory studies indicate that Muskoka ash is 25-30% calcium plus smaller amounts of other key plant nutrients including potassium, magnesium and phosphorus.

Working with three universities, we have applied over nine tonnes of processed wood ash to three sugar maple bushes and one research forest. Results have been very positive and among other benefits demonstrated that wood ash neutralizes the acidity of Muskoka soils, which have been damaged by decades of acid rain. Preliminary research suggests that ash application to the soil increases tree vitality and growth, meaning that trees are more storm-resistant and have the potential to capture more carbon!

We also work with citizen scientists to expand our understanding of the benefits of residential wood ash. Donated, filtered, and mixed ash has been distributed along with instructional kits to nearly 80 citizen scientists across Muskoka. Citizen scientists monitored trees on their property for at least one year to assess improvements in overall health metrics, with a select number of participants sending us foliage and soil samples for chemical analysis at Trent University.

My buckets/pails are full, and I cannot attend the next ash drive. What am I supposed to do?

Because of the Provincial regulations that apply to residential wood ash, Friends of the Muskoka Watershed staff are not permitted to pick up or transport ash from private residences. Ash can only be accepted at the Rosewarne Transfer Station on Ash Drive days. We can provide you with an extra bucket or two for storage if that helps.

Can I spread this on my own property?

While we would prefer you to store the wood ash for us, you may choose to sprinkle it on your own property. Restoration is another important component of FOTMW's work.

What have we learned?

We have learned the dosage of ash required to replace 50 years of acid rain damage. One 750 gram yogurt container of ash will restore the calcium lost in one square metre. (That's the same as 4 tonnes per hectare.) One volunteer describes it as spreading ash like you are feeding chickens!

What do I need to know to spread my own ash?

- Only use **clean ash**. Do not burn metallic foil, plastic products, pressure-treated wood, construction waste or wood that may contain chemical preservatives, insecticides, glue, nails, staples, other metals or paint.
- Allow your wood ash to cool completely – for several days before using. Hot ash is a real fire risk to homes, property and forests.
- Keep your ash dry until you are ready to spread it.
- Wear a mask, gloves and long clothing when spreading ash.
- Spread it in a location that you can keep people and pets away from for a couple of days.
- Sprinkle the ash thinly, about one 750 gram plastic yogurt container over one square metre. (That is equivalent to 4 tonnes per hectare).
- Only apply ash to each location once. Research suggests that one application is enough to replace 50 years of calcium depletion caused by acid rain.
- Avoid spreading ash over the snow, on a steep slope, or near surface water.

Do you care to know if I'm spreading my own ash and restoring my forest?

- Yes, please! Contact us and let us know if you are a self-spreader by emailing friends@fotmw.org

Friends of the Muskoka Watershed (FOTMW) is a charity that is funded by donations, memberships and grant when available. We'd appreciate your support at <https://fotmw.org/membership/>

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