

BUILDING A FIRE Á LA MAISON

We try to keep firewood available along the side of the house for early spring and late fall guests. If it starts to get depleted, let us know. But you may need to buy firewood at one of the hardware stores (like Weldom, Bricorama, M. Bricolage). Same with kindling. Building fires with the scrub oak in France requires some skill and patience. Here's how we do it.

For a simple radiant fire, just build a fire atop the closed grates, using the method below or any method if you're a skilled fire-builder. Make sure the flue is open (lower rings on hook just inside on right of fireplace opening). Always tend the fire, keep screen in front, put it out when leaving.

For a longer-lasting fire, and one which, after an hour or so, will activate fans blowing heat into the rooms, here are the directions:

- 1) Using the long iron tool with two prongs, insert the prongs fully in the holes on the front grate, and pull it open, so you have plenty of room to build a fire in the firebox below. (Be careful not to bend the tool, but you can also use it later to push around the burning logs.)*
- 2) Make sure the flue is open. The default position is open when the chain hangs free, but to keep the chain from getting too hot from the flames, fasten the double-ring at the bottom of the chain onto the hook on the inside-right of the fireplace. **(Please locate this hook before you do anything else, as you'll need to use it later.)***
- 3) Now build your fire: set up a long platform of two layers of kindling (15-20 pieces), with a few pieces of firestarter interspersed between pieces. Lay two of the smaller logs on top of the platform about half an inch apart. Start the fire.*
- 4) Once most of the wood has caught, lay two more small to medium sized logs crosswise on the others. It may take another 15 minutes before all the wood has started to blaze. If the fire is going strong, lay a larger log cross-wise on the flames. If the logs roll apart, move them so they remain crossed on each other and about ½ to ¾ inch apart. **Watch your head on the mantelpiece.***
- 5) When the fire is going strong, push the grate almost closed, leaving it open about an inch. And also unhook the flue chain and pull it down carefully, a foot or so, and hook the upper single ring onto the hook. **Pull the chain down just far enough to hook the ring, no more or you could break it off the flue door.** Now the upper flue is closed and the smoke should exit out of a flue hole in the fire box.*
- 6) If the fire is really going strong, you can close the grate fully. In about a half hour (more or less), a thermostat will activate fans that blow some heat into the living area, more heat into the master bedroom, and even more heat into the very top bedroom (in that bedroom we often keep the vent grate closed because of the heat). Once going, with the grate closed, the wood usually burns well and quickly, so add large extra logs regularly. **If you leave the grate open for any length of time with a fire going, be sure to release the flue chain and fasten the (lower) double-ring to the hook so that the upper flue is open, then pull it closed when you close the grate.***