

Electric Fireplace

[By Michelle Marie Kinney](#)

As nice as a fire is, a wood burning fire is expensive. The simple fact is that a wood burning fire takes more heat out of the home than it brings in. Since the flue will need to remain open for a time after the fire has died out, heat continues to be lost for some time. With the high cost of utilities, the ambiance of a fire can be costly.

The cost doesn't end with heat loss. The cost of wood and the annual maintenance of the chimney can run several hundred dollars. Of course there is the mess and effort of stocking and storing the wood.

Homeowners with wood burning fireplaces may consider converting their wood-burning fireplace to a gas fireplace. In some homes the cost and /or the feasibility of running gas lines is just not realistic. Again, we can't forget about cost. A gas fireplace is great, clean, and easy to turn on and off. But in today's world, gas fireplaces are expensive to run.

A reasonable and easy alternative is an electric log fire. Electric logs usually run on a 40-watt light bulb and they are as easy to plug in as a lamp. Electric logs can be purchased on line or at major home improvement stores. The large home improvement stores often carry electric logs on a seasonal basis. The logs cost about \$75.00, and are often marked down at the end of the season.



Photo A

Simply clean out your fireplace (be sure all ashes are out!) and drop in the electric logs. It's that easy. It's true that, the electric logs do not generate heat, and they do not look like a realistic fire. The light flickers and there is a "crackling" sound. But let's remember we are going for atmosphere. So dress it up. The photo below shows the same electric fire logs with some added decoration.



Photo B

First, the firebox was cleaned and painted. Yes, painted! We used a high heat flat black paint to make the firebox look crisp and clean. The electric fire logs were set on a metal firewood grate – the very same grate you'd use for real firewood. The logs may be placed directly on the floor of the firebox. But, we found setting the logs on the grate allows light to pass under the logs, and gives a more realistic and lively effect. To dress up the logs, we added some decorative "tracery" to act as a fire screen. In this case, the tracery happens to be metal. But, remember there's no real fire so any type of decorative screen will work.

The electric logs turn on and off with the flip of a switch. No wood, no flame, no mess!

Step by step – here's how we did it!

1. **Clean!** Clean out the firebox. This will be messy! Surround the hearth with drop cloths. Be sure all the ashes are out (not hot). Scoop up all the ashes possible with a whisk broom and a dust pan. Move slowly to keep the ashes from flying. Use a shop-vac to get the area as free from ashes as possible. Be sure to clean the walls of the firebox and remove any cobwebs hanging from above. Be sure the flue is closed.



Photo C

2. **Paint!** Use a disposable “chip” brush to apply the paint. The surface of the firebox may be very rough and the chip brushes are not very durable. So it's wise to have a couple chip brushes on hand. We used an oil based, high heat paint with a flat sheen. We are looking for a flat black background, so it's not necessary to have the perfect application. We wanted to cover everything – so we really slopped on the paint! If you have a wood fire grate, paint it too!



Photo D

3. **“Fire” it up!** Place the electric fire logs. The fire logs may be placed on the floor of the fire box but we found placing the fire logs on a wood grate looked better. It allowed light to come through the bottom of the logs. Extend the electrical cord to the closest electrical outlet. Wind the cord around any decorative items to hide the cord. Be sure not to damage the cord in any way. Plug it in, and enjoy!



Photo E

4. **Dress it up!** Since the fire logs don't look like a real flame, obscure the logs with a fireplace screen, glass doors or other decorative accessories. (See *photo B* above)



Before



After

The above is a narrative of our completed project. This does not constitute advice or council of any type. All projects are subject to local code. Always follow manufactures directions. Use caution and reasonable care at all times.

Michelle Marie Kinney
719-243-4632



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www.michellemariekinney.com