Wood-Fired Hot Tub How-To Guide

Everything from crate to first soak, and the small handful of habits that keep a wood-fired Tubby running beautifully for years.

The one-minute version

- **Inspect the crate before you sign for it.** Damage must be reported within five working days.
- **Fill the tub completely before you light the firebox.** Never, under any circumstances, light a dry firebox.
- **Two to three hours** from cold to soaking, depending on weather and how keenly you tend the fire.
- **No chemicals. Ever.** Fresh water and fire. Change the water every two to three days with regular use.
- **Stir before you get in.** Wood heats in layers and the top runs hotter than the bottom.
- **Oil the cedar every six to twelve months** and it will outlive the rest of your garden.

What you need on delivery day

TOOLS	PEOPLE	TIME
Pliers	**Three or four**	**Half a day**
For the crate clips. A screwdriver for the chimney	It is heavy and awkward. Mind your back and knees	Unpack, site, assemble, fill. Light it tomorrow if you like

Damage on arrival: do not accept the delivery. If the crate or the tub is damaged when it turns up, photograph it, refuse it, and contact us straight away at **info@soaknz.com**. All claims for shortage or delivery damage must reach us and the carrier within five business days.

Unpacking

1. **Safety first.** Get enough people together before you start lifting, and agree who is doing what.
2. **Inspect the crate.** Look for cracks, holes or crushed timber that suggest a rough trip.
3. **Find the clips.** Metal clips hold the crate together, on the sides and the top.
4. **Straighten them with pliers.** Bend each clip straight, keeping your fingers well clear — they pinch.
5. **Take the top and sides off.** Once the clips are straight the panels slide out easily.
6. **Lift the tub out together**, and carry it to its final spot. Check the path is clear first; putting a hot tub down halfway is not a thing you want to do twice.

> **Site it before you fill it.** Once there is water in the tub it is not moving. Flat, level and properly built up: see our **Recommended Foundations** guide at tubbytubs.co.nz for the three bases we recommend, and for the clearance the firebox needs.

Assembling the accessories

Chimney

The chimney comes in two sections with eight screws, four for each joint.

1. **Attach the lower section to the firebox** and secure it with four screws.
2. **Fit the upper section onto the lower one** and secure that with the remaining four.
3. **Check it stands true.** A chimney that leans will draw badly and is more likely to come loose.

Everything else

- **Cover, steps and stirring paddle** come out of their packaging and are ready to use.
- **The bung** is already fitted inside the tub. Check it is seated before you fill.
- **The hose fitting** attaches to the drain outlet so you can run a standard garden hose and take the water away from the tub when you empty it.

Filling

Make sure the tub is clean and free of debris, then fill from the garden hose. It takes a few hours depending on your water pressure, so it is a job to start and walk away from, checking the level now and again.

Fill it **completely**, cover it to keep leaves and grit out, and only then think about the fire.

> **Never light the firebox unless the tub is full.** The firebox is water-jacketed and relies on the water around it to carry the heat away. Lighting it dry, or with the water below the top of the firebox, will damage it and is not covered by warranty.

Lighting the firebox

Before you strike a match

- Clear the area of anything that burns: dry leaves, branches, garden furniture, pets.
- Make sure there is proper ventilation. Never run a firebox in an enclosed space.
- Have a fire extinguisher within reach.
- Clean out any ash left from the last fire, once it is completely cold.

Laying and lighting

1. **Paper and kindling** go in the bottom of the firebox. A small amount is plenty.
2. **Build a base** of larger dry firewood on top, with gaps between the logs for air.
3. **Light the paper** with a long-handled lighter or a fire starter. Commercial fire starters make this easy and there is no shame in using one.
4. **Feed it gradually** as the kindling catches, adding more wood to build a steady flame.
5. **Leave the firebox lid open** until the fire is well established, then close it down to burn steadily.

Keeping it going

Watch the flames and keep them burning evenly rather than roaring. Add logs as the wood burns down. From cold you are looking at two to three hours to temperature, faster on a still summer evening, slower in a Canterbury southerly.

> **Use dry, seasoned firewood.** Wet or green wood smokes, tars up the chimney and takes far longer to get you to temperature. Never use accelerants such as petrol or kerosene to start or revive a fire.

Your first soak

1. **Stir the water thoroughly** with the paddle. Wood heats in layers, and without a stir the top can be scalding while your feet are still cold.
2. **Check the temperature** with an accurate thermometer, after stirring. **38 °C is the ceiling.**
3. **Shower first.** Body oils and lotions form a film on the water and shorten how long a fill stays pleasant.
4. **Use the steps** getting in and out, and keep a hand on the stainless ledge.
5. **Keep soaks to 15–20 minutes**, drink water before and after, and get out the moment you feel light-headed.

> **No alcohol, no drugs.** They are the common thread in almost every hot tub accident. If you are pregnant, have a heart or circulatory condition, or take prescribed medication, talk to your doctor before you use a hot tub. The full safety guidance is in our **Hot Tub Safety** guide.

Water: the whole routine

This is the best part of owning a wood-fired tub. There are no chemicals, no test strips, no dosing and no chemistry to learn. Fresh water and fire is the entire system.

HOW OFTEN	WHAT YOU DO
Every two to three days with regular use	Drain it completely, give the inside a clean with a mild detergent and a soft brush or sponge, rinse thoroughly so no residue is left, and refill from the hose.
Every soak	Skim anything floating off the surface, and put the cover back on properly afterwards. A gaping cover loses heat and collects debris.
Never	Add chlorine, bromine, spa chemicals or anything else to a wood-fired tub. It is not designed for them, they are not needed, and they will not do the steel any favours.

> **Running one in a short-stay rental?** Drain, clean and refill between every guest, and keep a dated note of when you did it. That is the whole water-care obligation for a wood-fired tub — our **Water Care for Short-Stay Operators** guide covers the electric models, which are a different job entirely.

Emptying the tub

1. **Find the end cap** on the drain pipe.
2. **Twist it gently** until you feel and hear a click. That click is the cap releasing.
3. **Pull the cap straight out** with a firm, confident yank, then unscrew it completely.
4. **Push the uncapped pipe firmly back in.** The water starts to go.
5. **Attach the garden hose** to the drain fitting if you want the water further from the tub, into a drain or onto the garden.

Looking after the cedar

The cladding is what people see, and it is the part that needs you. Re-oil it at least once every twelve months — here in the South Island we would say every six.

We recommend **Wood-X**, in the "Hessian" colour, which is formulated for New Zealand conditions. It penetrates deeply rather than sitting on the surface, which is what protects against moisture and UV and keeps the timber from warping, cracking and splitting. More at **wood-x.co.nz**.

1. **Clean and dry the wood first**, removing dirt, debris and any old oil residue.
2. **Follow the manufacturer's instructions** for application.
3. **Apply evenly and thoroughly**, covering every timber surface.
4. **Pay attention to end grain** and anywhere exposed to direct moisture. These are the spots that fail first.

Clean the cladding regularly with a soft brush or cloth. Avoid harsh chemicals and abrasive cleaners, which damage the timber. Inspect it now and then for cracking, splitting or discolouration, and deal with any damage promptly rather than waiting.

> **Cedar moves, and that is not a fault.** Varying colour, grain and texture are natural, and small splits and cracks develop as the timber responds to its environment. None of it compromises the tub, and none of it is a defect under warranty.

Ongoing maintenance

Every few days

- Change and clean the water.
- Clear the ash box, once the ash is completely cold, into a metal container.
- Cover the tub whenever it is not in use.

Now and then

- Clean the cover of dirt and debris.
- Check the chimney is secure and drawing properly.
- Look over the tub for damage, leaks or unusual smells.
- Re-oil the cedar every six to twelve months.

> **Cold ash only.** Empty the ash box into a metal bucket with a metal lid and leave it there for at least a week before it goes near a rubbish bin. Ash holds heat for far longer than seems possible, and this is the single most common cause of fires involving wood-fired tubs.

Warranty and support

All Tubby Tubs products carry a **two-year manufacturer's warranty on parts** against defects and failure in normal use, in line with our recommendations. Defects should be reported to us in writing within seven days of being noticed, setting out what the defect is and the circumstances in which you found it. Full terms are at **tubbytubs.co.nz/legal/terms-and-warranty**.

Stuck on something?

Email us at **info@soaknz.com**. We would far rather spend ten minutes sorting it out with you than have you guess, and we answer every message ourselves.