

How to Build a Campfire

Be safe with your campfire to help prevent wildfires

A campfire can be a lot of fun, but it can also be a big responsibility.

Pre-Burn

Before you build a campfire make sure you have planned ahead and have the necessary equipment and ability to put your campfire out should it grow quickly beyond your expectations.

Survey the area - Ask yourself:

Is the wind blowing? Is it blowing towards a source of fuel, i.e., is there a dry tree downwind from the proposed campfire spot? Will the wind carry sparks into that tree? Should the campfire be built in another, safer location? Should a fire be built at all? Is my stack of fuel (wood) downwind from the proposed fire spot? Do I have a bucket full of water next to the proposed fire spot, a shovel?

Fire-Making Materials – Wood & Tinder

Did I bring the necessary fire making materials? Or am I going to forage around the area looking for wood? Many campgrounds prohibit gathering wood in or near campgrounds.

Stage the materials

Have a small supply of tinder, i.e., paper, thin sticks, thin wood chips.

Have a larger supply of intermediate sized sticks of wood.

Have even a larger supply of larger pieces of wood including small logs and wood the size of short 2 X 4's.

Building a Successful Fire is an Artform

Before you light the match

The **first secret** for building a **successful fire** is to position the tinder and then the sticks so that there is plenty of airflow between the pieces of wood.

The **second secret** is use only dry materials (especially the tinder) until the fire is burning extremely well.

The **third secret** is to insulate the tinder from the cold and often wet ground. Place a flat piece of wood down first and build your fire on top of that.

Two most popular fire construction designs – Teepee or Log Cabin – Either works fine

Teepee – sticks are leaned against each other, wider at the base and narrowing to form a point at the top with tinder inside. Leave an opening to insert the match into the tinder.

Log cabin – sticks are stacked to form a square with tinder in the center. Additional sticks are added as if building a 4-sided wall of sticks. Then sticks are added to form a roof. Leave an opening to insert the match.

Ignite the tinder with a match or lighter.

As the fire starts to grow add intermediate and then larger pieces of wood. Continue to follow the original construction design until the fire is going well.

Wet Wood – Can part of the wood used to build a fire be wet?

Yes, but only after the fire is going well. However, be aware, the fire will smoke excessively until the moisture has been burned out of the wet wood. A roaring fire can handle some wet wood, when added incrementally

You have successfully started a fire!

Good Campfire Etiquette

Selecting the Best Site

If an old fire ring is available, it should be used rather than build a new one.

Is there a compelling reason why another ring should be built rather than use an old one?

A fire ring surrounded by rocks helps contain the fire from spreading into nearby grass.

Remember, whenever a fire is built (no matter the size) the earth under it is sterilized and nothing will grow there for years. The earth will recover the ground over time, but it takes years before all effects of a campfire will be obliterated. The earth will not move the rocks and unless humans, animals or a flood relocate the rocks they will remain in a ring. ***Old fire rings are an unsightly litter – a blackened pimple on the landscape.***

Putting Out the Fire

Allow all wood to totally burn to ash.

Just because a fire looks out doesn't mean that it is. Often, if a wind comes up hot coals (down underneath and not visible) can be fanned, and what appeared as a dead fire can be restarted without anyone noticing.

Dowse the ashes with water.

The ashes will smoke for a minute or so and then stop.

Stir the coals to expose any hot spots – Keep adding water until all hissing stops.

Do Not Leave Partially Burnt Logs

Unless your departure will not allow for the time necessary for the wood to burn all the way down to ash, never dowse partially burnt wood logs with water and leave them for the next camper.

They are an unsightly litter.

Plan your fire adventure to end about the same time that the last embers are going out.

The secret is to stop adding wood long before you are finished with enjoying and using the fire.