

## How to Build a Fire

Gathering What You Need

Building the Actual Fire

Lighting a fire is only half the battle. The way you *build* a fire - that is, how you arrange the wood - can affect how long the fire will last and the amount of heat it'll give off during that time. This article will provide an overview of how to build a fire in any setting.

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### Part 1 of 2: Gathering What You Need



**1** **Get an ignition source.** The most obvious choice is a lighter or matches, but if you're in a pinch, try one of these ideas:

- [How to Create Fire With a Magnifying Glass](#)
- [How to Light Wet Matches \(or if you're proactive, Make Waterproof Matches\)](#)
- [How to Identify Flint so you can Start a Fire With Magnesium and Flint](#)
- [How to Start a Fire with Sticks](#)
- [How to Make Fire Without Matches or a Lighter](#)

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**2 Gather tinder.** Tinder catches the initial spark from the ignition source and transfers it to the kindling. If the kindling is damp or wet, the tinder must burn long enough to dry out the kindling.<sup>[1]</sup>

- You can turn dry sticks and pieces of bark into powdery tinder with a knife.
- Other sources of tinder include:
  - dead dry plants and grasses
  - wax
  - lint
  - birch bark
  - charcloth
  - moss
  - wood shavings
  - paper
  - pine pitch
  - dry needles from coniferous trees
  - fire sticks
  - fire starters



**3 Gather kindling.** Kindling needs a large surface to volume ratio (about 1/8" to 1/2" diameter) and more bulk than tinder so it can ignite easily, produce sustained concentrated heat and flame, and light the main fuel source.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Good sources: dry twigs and wood pieces, cardboard, large pieces of wood cut into small pieces, and fuzz sticks (sticks with shavings cut into them, but still attached).
- If you need to split small pieces of wood into smaller pieces for kindling, try these methods:
  - Hold the wood you want to split parallel to the ax, with the top of the stick touching the ax blade. Both your hands are near the bottom of the ax handle: one holding the ax, and the other holding the stick. With the stick touching the ax blade where you want it to split, swing both the stick and the ax together to hit the chopping block. When the ax splits the stick, give it a twist to finish splitting the stick into two pieces.
  - To split a small piece of wood, hold the stick upright, either by sticking into the ground or holding it with your feet. Take a rock a little bigger than your fist, and smack the end of the stick with the rock until a crack has been created. Peel the layers back with your fingers to split the wood into smaller pieces.



**4** **Gather logs or other bulky fuel sources.** Good fuels for sustained burning include dry wood that is 1" to 5" (2.5 cm to 12.5 cm) in diameter, twisted dry grasses, peat, dried animal dung and coal. Gather more fuel than you think you'll need, especially if you're going to sleep by the fire.

- Green or wet fuel can be used, but only once the fire is established because it will burn more slowly than dry fuel.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Softwoods/conifers/evergreens have leaves in the shape of needles. They burn quickly and very hot, and they also contain flammable resins which burn hotter and help with starting a fire. Because of this, they're often used for kindling as well, since they're easier to ignite than hardwoods. You will know if you are using a wood with resin because it crackles and pops while burning.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Hardwoods have broad flat leaves and they don't catch fire as easily as softwoods. Once they do, however, they burn for a longer period of time and give off more heat.<sup>[1]</sup> It may be necessary to know [How to Split Hardwood Firewood](#) or [How to Split Gnarly Firewood](#)
- You can also [Make Logs from Newspapers](#).

## Part 2 of 2: Building the Actual Fire



**1** **Clear a circular area about 4 feet (1.2 m) in diameter.** Build a ring of rocks or dig a fire pit that's several inches deep using a shovel or hand trowel. Constructing a ring of stones will insulate the fire. Building a fire wall with logs or rocks will reflect the fire's heat, especially if you'll only be on one side of the fire (because otherwise the heat sent off in the other direction is wasted).

- If the ground is wet or covered with snow, build a platform out of green logs and cover them with a layer of earth or stones.





**2** Pile kindling loosely in your fire ring or fire pit. You want your kindling close enough to ignite but spaced enough for good air circulation.

- Place your tinder on the pile of kindling. Light the fire with your ignition source and gradually add more kindling.



- Slowly blow air on the igniting fire to build heat and intensity.



**3 Add firewood starting with the smallest sized pieces and working your way up toward large pieces.** The arrangement you choose will determine the fire's longevity, how fast it burns, and how long your wood lasts.

- **Build a tepee.** Arrange the tinder and a few sticks of kindling in the shape of a cone, and light them at the center. The outside logs will fall inward and feed the fire. This is the most effective of all fire arrangements.



- Since a flame is hottest at the tip of the fire (where the oxygen combusts into fire to create carbon dioxide) the top of the tepee is where the most intense heat will be, so if a stick is thicker at one end, be sure to place the thicker end at the top of the tepee.
  - Because of the tepee arrangement, wet wood and green wood will burn well. However, since very intense heat is generated by the arrangement, the fire burns through wood rather quickly.<sup>[2]</sup>
- **Construct a log cabin.** Stack layers in alternating directions to form 4 walls in the shape of a square. Leave enough room for a tepee structure in the center, and make sure that air can circulate between the logs in your "cabin" walls.
    - The "chimney effect" will suck air in through the bottom and let it exit through top as strong flame. If the fire seems like its not getting enough oxygen, dig small holes under the walls to allow for better air flow, or blow on the fire to reach optimal burning temperature.
    - This arrangement is best for cooking food, because the square shape creates uniform heat. You can place food on top of the stack for a while if you use larger, green pieces of wood at the top.
  - **Erect a pyramid.** Place 2 small logs or branches on the ground so that they're parallel to each other. Then, put a solid layer of small logs or branches on top of them in a perpendicular direction.
    - Add 3 or 4 more layers, each time alternating the direction, and each layer being smaller than the one before.
    - Light the top of the pyramid on fire, and the flame will naturally travel down toward the base.
  - **Build a lean-to.** Push a green stick into the ground at a 30-degree angle with its tip pointing in the direction of the wind. Put tinder underneath and lean sticks of kindling against the main stick. Light the tinder and add more kindling as needed.



- **Dig a cross ditch.** Scratch a cross in the ground that's 12" (30 cm) in diameter. Make it 3" (7.5 cm) deep, and place a big wad of tinder in the middle. Build a pyramid out of kindling over the tinder. The ditch will allow air to flow through and feed the fire.
- **Create a star.** With this arrangement, you can push the logs inward to increase heat, and pull them out to decrease heat. This method is particularly helpful if you're trying to conserve fuel.<sup>[2]</sup>



**4** Finished.

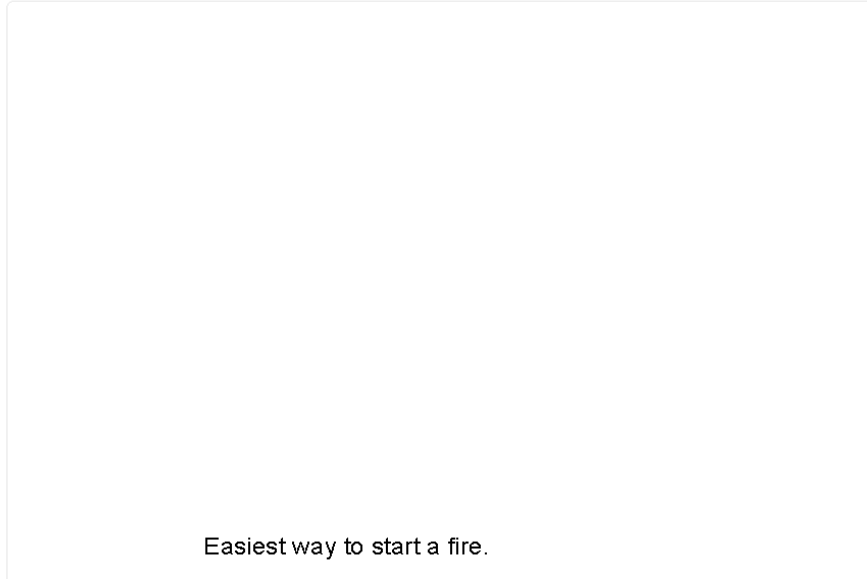
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## Tips

- If you want to reuse a fire soon, instead of using water to put out the fire, use dirt. Water will make your whole fire pit damp and hard to re-light, even after longer periods of time.
- If you will be at a campsite or other area for multiple days, store some fuel in a dry area just in case it rains.
- Keep a pair of water-filled buckets near before starting your fire. If the fire goes out of control, then you will have something nearby to put it out. If there is little water in your area, fill the buckets with sand or soil instead. For larger fires, prepare more buckets.
- Avoid building a fire too close to tents and sleeping areas.
- Avoid using stones from in or near water to line your fire pit. Rocks store water inside their structures and if rapidly heated they can crack and explode.
- Never build a fire underneath a tree or low hanging tree branches.
- For maximum amount of heat, build fire next to a large rock to reflect heat. This will double the amount of heat radiated by the fire, and will keep you extra warm.
- Cooking over an open fire is fun, but very inefficient. A [camping stove](#) controls airflow and cooks food more effectively.
- Make sure you have plenty of fire wood collected for your fire. No one wants to wake up at 3 a.m. only to see their fire is out. Once you think you have enough wood, collect 3 times as much more!
- To avoid an unwanted second fire, protect logs in the vicinity of your fire that you want to burn later from catching fire from errant sparks and embers by laying them separate from one another rather than stacking them.

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### Warnings

### Things You'll Need

- Ignition source
- Tinder
- Kindling
- Fuel
- Rocks
- Shovel or hand trowel

### Related wikiHows



How to Keep a Fire Burning



How to Cook Breakfast over an Open Fire



How to Have a Bonfire



How to Create Fire With a Magnifying Glass



How to Start a Fire With Sticks



How to Build a Campfire

### Sources and Citations

- ↑ <sup>1,01,11,21,31,4</sup> <http://www.survivaltopics.com/survival/how-to-build-a-fire-the-definitive-guide/>
- ↑ <sup>2,02,1</sup> <http://www.wilderness-survival.net/fire-4.php>

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