

Starting_Fires_With_Damp_Wood_1995.txt

From: Danny

Subject: Fire Starters

Last-modified: 23 July 1995

Summary: This is a compendium of messages I found about starting fires with damp wood.

This is a compendium of messages I found about starting fires with damp wood.

This file is likely to grow as I append new entries as they cross my way. The most recent version of this file is stored on ftp.ethz.ch. For you net freaks out there, the URL is:

<ftp://ftp.ethz.ch/rec.scouting/outdoors/fire-starters>

If you have additions to this file, let me know.

~From: kent

One "trick" that we have learned in starting fires with wet wood is to keep a flame on the damp tinder for an extended period of time. We accomplish this by using cheap votif candles. These candles are about 1 1/2 inches in diameter and 1 1/2 inches tall. They will burn for a long time, producing quite a bit of heat, and, when protected, will start your tinder even in a light sprinkle. It is not a problem to carry several of these with you on a back-packing trip; they are safe and easily replaced.

We also make "fire-bugs" by stuffing dryer lint into egg carton shells and then filling with melted parafin wax. They work very well. The dryer lint works very

well by itself, it just doesn't last long enough to start damp wood.

~From: Dennis

>Any tips on starting a fire with damp wood? This is for a survival class,
>so "keep your wood covered" is not the answer I'm looking for. The scout
>handbook suggests cutting into a log to get to the dry wood inside. Any
>other tips would be appreciated.

Always a fun challenge...

- * Larger logs, when split open, will probably have some dry wood towards the center. This can be shaved off to help create tinder (and possibly kindling, depending upon the thickness of the log and how long it's been wet for).
- * Certain types of pine and sappy softwoods occasionally develop centers of sapwood that some people call "fatwood" - it usually looks waxy or oily, and will burn quickly even when wet.
- * The most important thing is making sure that you have enough DRY tinder to both dry out and light your kindling (cut your kindling thinner than usual to facilitate drying it out). If you have dry tinder with you, great. If not, look for fatwood (see above), birch bark (from a fallen tree if possible, but if it's really a survival situation, I'm not gonna fault you...), and any dry stuff around. Twigs lower on a tree and closer to the trunk will probably be driest. Evergreens (particularly firs) are good to find dry wood on, even after a few days of rain.
- * If something is already dry, by all means, KEEP IT THAT WAY!

Once your fire gets to rolling, you shouldn't have any problem. Dry wood out by laying it next to the fire, and use smaller pieces of fuel wood to keep it going. They'll dry out better and hopefully prevent smouldering.

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Oh... since this is for a survival course, recommend that they keep a fire starter in their survival kits. It's amazing how much help a wax candle stub can be in damp weather ;-).

~From: Danny

Having some newspaper or solid lighter (meta tablets, cardboard impregnated with parrafine, etc) helps a lot.

Someone on rec.backcountry suggested to use rests of acrylic plastic. I don't recommend it (I needn't comment on the resulting pollution), but it sure develops a long-lasting hot flame.

We teach our kids to use the small one-year branches at the bottom of the pine (christmas) trees. They catch fire easily even if it has rained or snowed for a week, and they should be removed anyway to give some room and light to the smaller plants in the same area.

My last suggestion is to look for the cut-down remainings of older pines (or equivalent needle trees). They often have a very resinous wood which gives a long-lasting fire, even under the worst conditions. The color of the wood is usually much darker than normal, something between orange and dark red.

It might be interesting to note that making a fire with damp wood is one of the first things a cub scout learns over here (quite naturally: it rains fairly often, and we make a fire at every meeting).

~From: hayes

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Check the Wilderness Survival Merit Badge pamphlet and the Field Book. Our troop frequently has wet wood fire building contests. Soak a couple of logs for a day or two, give 'em a knife, an ax, and two matches. Burn through a string three feet above base of fire pit. Usually only takes about 4 to 8 minutes from go to burn.

Remember the basics, tinder is what starts a fire, kindling starts the fuel. With wet wood you need lots of tinder and kindling, Split the wood, or break it or dig into it. Get at least Two LARGE handfuls of tiny splinters and shavings, four is better. Make sure you have LOTS of kindling about pencil thickness and some that gets gradually larger to about 3/4 inch diameter. Build your lay carefully, the younger scouts today, doing most of their camping with stoves, have the hardest time with this part. ...well maybe the rest of the preparation too.

~From: bacchus

Two ways that I thought of both stem from "being prepared".
FIRST: What about those magnesium blocks/flint combos? Easy to carry.

SECOND: Easy firestarter to carry: Soak charcoal in lighter fluid, then coat in paraffin. Wax will melt with one match, and ensuing fire should start damp wood. Any other ideas?

~From: juan

Just to add one more thought. The temperature of your wood is important. Surely you've noticed that it's much easier to light your campfire on a warm afternoon than on a cold morning? The same applies to damp wood, if you can warm some tinder inside your parka, you'll have a much better chance

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of getting it to blaze.

From: fsbgf@acad3.alaska.edu (Brandon France)
Subject: Re: Fire starting with damp wood
Date: Tue, 1 Dec 1992 19:48:18 GMT

I've found that the best way to start a fire with wet or damp wood is to be prepared and carry a road flare with you. If you put your wet kindling around the road flare it is sure to build a nice warm fire. You don't even need matches to get it started. I always carry a flare just in case.

~From: mwilson

Try starting with "squaw wood." This is dead wood and twigs still on the tree (off the ground) and in arms reach (don't have to bend over to pick it up). Generally this wood will be fairly dry shortly after a rain.

You could locate some "lighter" or "fat" pine. That is pine that is full of sap. Remember that pine sap is the basis for turpentine. "Fat" wood smells like turpentine and looks sort of wet. It lights real easy. It is hard to clean up after so use it only for starting the fire not for cooking.

It is critical to start small and build slowly when using damp wood.

~From: lynnef

A previous poster suggested soaking cardboard in lighter fluid and then covering with wax as a firestarter. We have reasonable success using cardboard egg cartons, wood chips/sawdust, and paraffin. In the USA, Girl Scouts can't use fuel or fire starter that has to be poured (safety rules). We melt the paraffin (in a double boiler), put the wood chips or sawdust into the egg carton cups, and then pour the paraffin over the

wood, filling up the cup. Then we just rip off firestarter cubes as we need them, usually 3 or so for a biggish charcoal fire.

~From: grey

This is another variation on the egg carton idea...
My scoutmaster always had what looked like miniature egg carton shells that were about 1/2 the size of regular egg-type cartons. He said he used a mixture of paraffin, sawdust, and charcoal. The paraffin was melted in a double boiler, mixed with the sawdust and the ground up charcoal 1 to 1 to 1. The egg carton halves were then filled with this mixture and allowed to partially solidify. Two halves were then pressed together so that they would break into "eggs" when needed. The whole thing was then coated with a film of paraffin.

~From: Anne

We use a variation on the cardboard egg cartons for firestarters. We take the lint from out of clothes dryers, fill up the cartons and pour melted paraffin over the lint. (For safety use a double boiler arrangement for melting the wax).

I have never had any problems doing these but I had some of my older girls doing them under the supervision of another leader and they did not melt the wax on the stove, instead doing it in hot water. This meant that it was not hot enough to soak right down into the lint and set as soon as it was poured, not sticking the lint etc into the egg carton.

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