

## Start a camp fire in the rain

Fire needs 3 elements to survive: Fuel, Air, and Heat. This is known as the "Combustion Triangle". Deprive a fire of any one of the elements and it dies. Water does two things; it deprives a fire of oxygen and it cools the temperature to below the combustion point of the fuel being used.

Our job is to create a campfire when everything in the environment appears to be wet. Notice that the operative word is "APPEARS". Even after a rainstorm there is tinder and firewood that is dry. Knowing where to look and what to look for are the keys to success.

Let's start with tinder. Look around your site for fir trees. The smaller lower branches that have died as a result of being denied sunlight by the larger upper branches are the first choice. The same branches that shielded these dead branches from sunlight have probably shielded them from the rain. These smaller branches are usually dry and will break off in your fingers. Collect a good amount of these. Take a little extra time to fray and shred these with your knife or fingers. Also look for dry grass under these trees. Look for birch trees as the bark is impregnated with oil and will not absorb moisture. Bird nests and wasp nests (unoccupied of course) are also good sources of tinder. The wasp nests look like brown golf balls and the unoccupied ones are usually found on the ground. The bird nests are a little trickier and you will have to look for them. Also you can use a piece of cloth from a shirt or other article of clothing if necessary. Do not overlook the contents of your wallet. All those useless business cards burn very nicely.

The next step is kindling. Look for trees known as "Dead Falls". These are trees that have fallen and are now in various stages of decay. Locate one that has been down for a while. Strip off the outer bark and cut chunks out of the rotting trunk. This will burn fast, so gather as much as you can. The larger branches can also be stripped of bark and the wood below used. Do not forget to look under and around these "Dead Falls" for wood that has been protected from the moisture.

Another tip to be mindful of when foraging for dry wood is: look for pine trees. Many of these trees will have a sticky sap running down the bark. Collect this sap or pitch. It acts as an accelerant for your fire.

Before you start a fire make sure you have collected enough fuel to keep it burning for a length of time. Whatever you collect, protect it from getting wet with pieces of bark, stones, or a piece of plastic (if it is available).

Firewood is the main staple of any fire. Here again, the Dead Falls"" are your best bet. You can use logs up to 3 feet in diameter. Even if you cannot cut them into a usable length, just strip the bark off them and insert the end into the fire. As the log burns, just keep pushing it into the fire.

Building the Fire - There are 2 ways to start a fire in a wet environment. The first is to create a bed for the kindling to rest on. This is a very simple operation. Choose 2 sticks about 1 foot long and about 1 inch in diameter. Lay them parallel to one another. Loosely stack kindling in 3 layers on top of these base sticks. Alternate the direction of these layers (i.e. the first layer at right angles to the base, the next layer parallel to the base and the third layer again at right angles). Next place your tinder material underneath this stack. There should be openings at either end of the base. This opening will also serve as a vent for the fire once it is started.

The other method of building a fire is to place the tinder in the center and construct a Tee Pee around it with the kindling you have collected.

Igniting the Fire -- Here too, there are several methods of accomplishing this task. Hopefully you came into this experience prepared. If you brought a disposable lighter, waterproof matches, or have book matches that are not wet, simply light the tinder. Once the fire is burning add small pieces of wood a few at a time from your kindling stock. Be careful not to add too much as this might smother the fire. Gradually increase the size of the wood until the fire is burning. Only add the larger logs after

the fire is firmly established.

If you are totally unprepared and have no matches or a disposable lighter you can use a bow and drill. This method is the most versatile as the materials to make one are easily found wherever trees grow. However, this method is far from easy and it should be learned thoroughly before you attempt it. I attempted this once. It took me the better part of a day to get a fire going using this method.

If you are unexpectedly stranded, there are several ways to ignite a fire. A car battery and a piece of wire from the vehicle's electrical system will work. Remove the battery from the vehicle and a piece of wire about 3 feet long. Soak a piece of cloth with gasoline by breaking or loosening the fuel line. Strip both ends of the wire and wrap one end around the negative terminal of the battery. Put the gasoline soaked cloth over the positive terminal and touch the other end of the wire to it. Be careful, as the cloth will ignite almost instantly. Place the burning cloth under your tinder.

You can also use the vehicle's cigarette lighter as an ignition source.

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