

# Campfire Ring

## Campfire Preparation

Before you ever strike a match, you are responsible for a lot of pre-fire planning. Whether you are making a fire for fun, cooking, or warmth, make sure you consider these topics and make good decisions to ensure a safe and appropriate fire. Just as there are 3 elements to fire (fuel, air, heat), there are 3 keys to preparing for fire - permits, safety, and site selection.

### Fire Permits

Every national park, state or federal forest, and all public land has fire burning restrictions. Those restrictions may range from 'any fire any place' to 'no fires at all' depending on fire danger levels and environmental impacts. It is **your responsibility** to find out and understand the restrictions before you enter an area. A phone call to the local forest ranger or land manager will enlighten you and keep you out of trouble. Sometimes permits have a cost, but often are free and are a simple means to track and manage forest use.



Some areas also require 'Use Permits' that are often free and used just for tracking visitors. If you fail to get a required permit, then there may be a fine if you are checked.

### Fire Danger

Even if you *CAN* have a fire, it doesn't mean you *SHOULD* have a fire. When in the wild, you always need to use sense and be prepared to take responsibility for the results of your actions. There are three key indicators you should consider whenever you are interested in lighting a fire of any size:

- **Wind**

- embers and sparks can easily blow dozens of feet on a gust of wind. On a windy day, use a [backpack stove](#) or [special fire lay](#) to minimize fire danger.

- **Heat**



- high temperatures increase the risk of spreading fire. Higher temperatures dry out vegetation and keep fires alive. Besides, a fire on a hot day isn't nearly as nice as on a cool evening.

## • Humidity

- Low humidity sucks moisture out of vegetation and dead fuel. This makes a perfect environment for [fire by friction](#) practice, but a dangerous environment for wild fires.

A dry, hot, wind is the ultimate wildfire maker. Numerous campfires have been whipped into wildfires destroying thousands and thousands of acres of wilderness all because a person made a poor choice and built a fire in dangerous conditions without considering the risks of his or her actions.

It is best to be conservative - only start a fire when conditions are good, not when conditions are 'not too bad'. And remember that you are a guest in the wilderness and have a responsibility to protect it from your impact.

## Fire Safety

So, you decided to have a fire. That's great! It should be a lot of fun and mmmmmmmmm, your meal will taste great! Now, before you start building it, make sure you can put it out! And, the only sure way to do that is with **water** - not dirt or sand, just water.

If you do not have adequate water to extinguish your fire, you should not be lighting it. Covering a fire with dirt will extinguish the flames, but the hot coals can continue to smolder for hours - long enough to ignite underground roots or to blaze back to life when the wind picks up the next day after you have left the site.



And, the water should be immediately available right by the fire, not in the river 200 feet away or in a bottle over by the tent. The water needs to be earmarked for fire suppression and not just whatever is left after cooking and cleaning. If you don't do that, you'll discover that all the water is used up right when that stray ember starts some dry grass burning.

## Fire Site

Considering fire danger levels, having correct permits, and being prepared to extinguish your fire are all important steps to guarantee a safe fire. **Where** you actually build your fire and how you prepare the site are the two most important things you do once you decide to have a campfire.

A fire makes an impact wherever it burns. As a conscientious wilderness visitor, you decide how big and how long-lasting that impact will be. Your goal should be to leave no trace of fire once you move on - please see [Leave No Trace Dude](#) website for all aspects of minimizing your wilderness impact. As far as your campfire goes, you make an impact in many ways, and all of them can be minimized:

- **Gather Fuel** - gathering wood far away from camp and taking only dead, down branches makes less impact. Taking close, easy wood soon strips a site and leaves a scar on the land.
- **Disperse Ashes** - burn all wood down to ash. When you leave the site, take the ash with you and disperse it into the woods well off the trail. Leaving ashes at the site flags it and attracts others to overuse the same spot, creating a high-use sore.
- **Fire Site** - making a small fire that can be easily erased should be your goal when choosing a fire site. If there is an existing fire ring, use it, otherwise take extra steps to ensure a stealth fire.

When using the wilderness, you should make use of the most durable surface available. For example, walking on rocks instead of fragile grass when hiking, or setting up a tent on sand instead of a field of wildflowers. The same goal is true when making your fire, but there are some things that you may not have considered. Here are ways to make a fire that will have a minimal impact:

- **Fire Mat or Pan** - bring your own pan or mat in which to build your fire. Set this on a few supporting stones to have zero impact and remember to spread out your wood gathering and ashe dispersal.
- **Sand** - scoop out a shallow fire ring in sand. When finished, scoop ash and dead coals out and disperse them. Smooth sand over the ring and no one will know you were there.
- **Rock** - building a fire on a flat rock sounds like a good idea. Easy to remove the ash and it is sure durable. The problem is that a fire will blacken the rock noticeably and it may last many years. If you make a fire under a rock overhang, the smoke can make a very visible mark for a long time.



- **Dirt** - probably the most common place to make fire. This is usually from previous use. If there is a fire ring in place, use it. If you need to make your own fire site, do this:
  - Ensure there is no overhanging vegetation. Picture of leaf-covered site with trees and brush.

- Clear an area 10 feet across. Picture of area cleared of leaves in 10 foot circle
- Optionally create a small barrier from logs or rocks. Skip this if you are in a light traffic area. Picture of rock or log circle
- Get your water ready. Picture of water bucket by circle
- Lay, light, and enjoy your fire. Picture of fire
- After extinguishing your fire, scoop up the ash and coals to be dispersed. Picture of scooping
- Restore the area as it was. Picture of original area
- **Mound Fire** - in a fairly pristine area, using a fire mound for a small fire may be the best bet. There are details about building a mound fire at [Leave No Trace Dude](#) website, but basically you:
  - lay down a tarp
  - pile mineral soil on top and flatten it to 6 inches deep
  - use your fire on the mound
  - disperse the ash and return the soil

This method of fire has no lasting impact when done correctly. Picture of mound fire

Move Along: [Fire Fuel Kindling and Tinder](#)

**Flint & Steel**

**Fire  
Pistons**

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