

## How to Make the Most of your Campfire

To quote Smokey the Bear of the Forest Service, "Only YOU can prevent forest fires." Smokey the Bear means business and knows what he is talking about. When you take a camping trip the last thing you want to do is start a forest fire! Therefore, you should learn proper campfire safety before you head out on your camping adventure.

Campfires are a staple of most camping trips. Campfires allow everyone to congregate, cook food, and seek warmth and heat. Campfires require more than a flick of switch which you may be used to at home. You can find most of the campfire wood at the campsite. However, you may be staying at a heavily used camping area that has been stripped of viable firewood. Therefore, you should bring some firewood from home. It is better to be safe than sorry when it comes to firewood so plan to bring some with you on your camping trip. You will also need to bring matches from home to start your fire. Don't be a Boy Scout hero and try to start a fire by rubbing sticks together. This should only happen in dire emergencies. Use matches instead!

When should I build my campfire? It depends on your plans, but in general it is good idea to prepare and build your campfire when you first arrive at the campsite. Just make sure that you always closely supervise the campfire. Never leave the campfire unattended. Where

should I find firewood and what types of wood should I use? Seek out firewood several yards away from the campsite area first before you use any firewood that you have brought. The firewood you bring from home is really meant to be used as a backup. It will take some time to search through the woods and campsite area for firewood. Search for wood that is cedar, pine, and fir as these wood types work well in starting a campfire. Be kind to and respect the environment and only pick up branches that are dead and have already fallen from their trees.

Note: Ensure that you have a large bucket of water available to put the fire out before you even build the fire. Heed Smokey the Bear's advice!

Where should I build my campfire? It is critical that you create a campfire in designated areas only! Look for a fire pit, stove, or fireplace. Many campsites will provide maps and signs that designate fire pit areas. Remember to follow any rules posted by the campsite or park where you are camping. Drier times of the year tend to yield fire safety alerts and will affect your campfire plans. The fire safety alerts are not meant to be nuisance, but to be a safe guard for your protection.

How do I build my campfire? First, clean the area around in and around the fire pit. Remove any excess trash, camping equipment, and vegetation that are fire hazards. Second, construct a small teepee of dry twigs and sticks. Use a match to start the fire. You can add bigger pieces of wood as the fire increases in size. Make sure to keep the fire small though. You don't need to heat the entire campsite and large fires are dangerous.

How should I extinguish my campfire? Pour the large bucket of water on the campfire to quell the flames. Use a stick to mix the ashes around. Pour another large bucket of water on the ashes. Ensure that there are no sparks or simmering embers left before you leave the campfire. If all the ashes are cold when you touch them, then you are good to go. Always clean up the campfire area when you leave. Follow these tips and you should have a safe campfire that can be enjoyed by all.