

## UI Extension Forestry Information Series

### Building an Easy Starting Fire

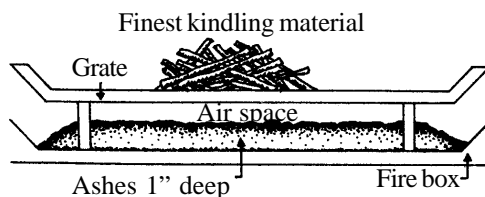
Don Hanley

Starting a fire in a fireplace or stove can often be a frustrating experience if the wood does not ignite rapidly. Here are a few “keep in mind” pointers to make fire-building as easy as possible:

- Be sure the damper is open fully. It is often desirable to crack open a nearby window or door on well-insulated and weathertight homes.
- Use an adequate amount of finely split dry kindling wood, mixed with shredded paper or shavings for the center of the fire. Good kindling species are pine, spruce and straight grained larch.
- The finest kindling should be about half the diameter of a pencil. Place it on the fire grate in a “teepee” or criss-cross pattern (Figure 1).
- Place gradually larger wood pieces on the teepee until you have pieces that are 1 inch in diameter. Then light the fire.
- Once the smaller wood is vigorously burning, add wood up to 2 inches in diameter. Avoid adding too much wood at once because this tends to smother the fire.
- When the largest wood is vigorously burning, your fire is well established. At this time hardwoods can be added for a long lasting fire.

Maintain a 1- to 2-inch bed of ashes under the grate. This ash layer will add heat to the fire and will insulate and protect the bottom of the firebox. Ashes should not be allowed to accumulate so deep that they touch the bottom of the grate.

**Figure 1.** Place pencil-size kindling on fire grate in “teepee” pattern.



Do not use an excessive amount of paper to start the fire. The resulting “flash” fire is hazardous to you and your fireplace. Additionally, large paper ashes may go up the chimney and land on the roof of your home. One or two sheets of paper will be enough.

Commercial products are available to aid in starting a fire. Carefully follow the instructions outlined by the manufacturer. Never use gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid or other flammable liquids when starting a fire because they contain vapors which are heavier than air and under certain conditions can result in a large “flash” fire.

If you plan to burn the ornamental sawdust/wax logs available commercially, carefully follow the manufacturer’s directions. Do not burn charcoal or Styrofoam in your fireplace. These materials release dangerous carbon monoxide fumes into the living area of your home.

The best way to obtain easy-splitting, straight-grained kindling wood in small conifer trees is to cut lengths of firewood between the branch whorls (Figure 2). This will eliminate most knots, which make splitting difficult.

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**Figure 2.** Cut between branch whorls to eliminate knots in kindling.

