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Energy Facts: Building An Easy Starting Fire  
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Cooperative Extension Service  
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# ENERGY FACTS

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## Building An Easy Starting Fire

Don Hanley, Extension Forester

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 (Fig. 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 that is up to 2 inches in diameter.
- 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 fire and will insulate and protect the bottom of the fire box. Ashes should not be allowed to accumulate to a depth that touches the bottom of the grate. If so, they will burn

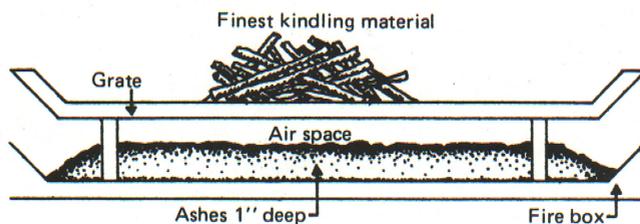


Fig. 1. Place pencil-size kindling on fire grate in "teepee" pattern.

out the grate prematurely and block air flow to the fire.

Do not use an excessive amount of paper to help you 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.

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.

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

If you plan to burn the ornamental sawdust/wax logs available commercially, carefully follow the manufacturer's directions.

Do not burn charcoal and styrofoam in your fireplace. That could release dangerous carbon monoxide fumes into the living area of your home.

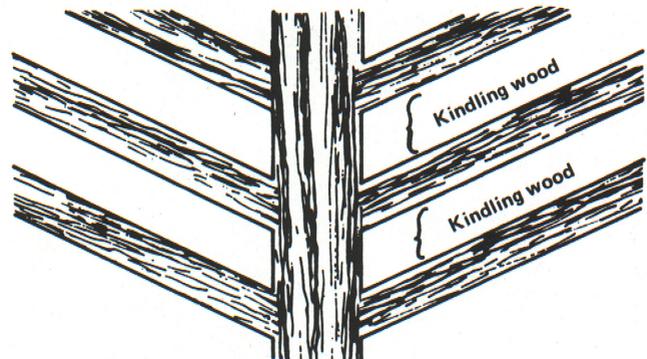


Fig. 2. Cut between branch whorls to eliminate knots in kindling.

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