FIELD GUIDE · NO. 04

Fire Lay Comparison

Different fire lays do different jobs. Choose the one that fits the work, the weather, and the wood you have.



FROM THE BOOK

1. There is no single correct way to arrange firewood. A fire lay is simply how the wood is stacked before you light it. Match the lay to the job — quick heat, cooking, or a longer, steadier burn — rather than following one rule.
2. Prepare the site first. Stay away from low-hanging branches, dry grass, tents, and anything that could ignite. Use an established fire ring when you can. If a new fire is permitted, choose bare soil or another nonflammable surface and clear leaves, pine needles, and other combustibles for several feet around the area.
3. Gather more tinder, kindling, and fuel than you think you will need before you strike a match. Lighting the fire should be the last step, not the first.
4. A tipi (teepee) lay leans sticks into a cone with room for air through the center. Tinder goes underneath. It starts quickly and produces strong heat, though it can burn through fuel faster and may need more tending.
5. A log-cabin lay stacks wood in alternating layers around the tinder to form a square. It burns more evenly, often needs less rearranging, and is a practical choice for cooking or a longer fire. A lean-to lay uses a larger stick as both support and a windbreak, which helps in breeze or slightly damp conditions.
6. Fire needs heat, fuel, and air. Packing wood too tightly can starve the flame; spreading it too far lets heat escape. A modest, well-built fire is usually more useful than a large one. Never leave a fire unattended. Keep water or a shovel nearby. When you leave, drown the coals, stir the ashes, and feel them with the back of your hand — if they are still warm, the fire is not out. Build fires only where they are permitted.

PRACTICE IT

On a day when fires are allowed, build a small tipi or log-cabin fire in a safe, established ring. Practice putting it completely out: water, stir, and check that the ashes are cool to the touch.