

How to Start a Fire (In your wood stove)

Anybody can start a fire, right? What could be easier? Get some wood and some matches and away you go! Pretty soon you'll be making goo-goo eyes at someone in the warm glow wondering where the romance went as you try to get all the smoke out of your house. Some people start their fires with I like to call "the Manhattan start up" three pieces of wood and one page of the Wall Street Journal. Although this might be a good way to make smoke, I can share a better way to BUILD A FIRE!

To start a fire you need at least six things:

- Draft
- Dry Wood
- Tinder
- Matches or a lighter
- Kindling
- Stove top thermometer

Draft is a force in your chimney that is the result of a temperature difference between the air inside the chimney and the air outside that causes a pressure difference. This pressure difference causes the air inside the chimney to rise up and exit from the top of the chimney.

Tinder is any dry combustible substance such as newspaper or wood shavings that will catch fire when you touch them with a lit match or lighter

Kindling is wood that is very dry and split into pieces that are no bigger than 1 inch by 1 inch

Dry wood is wood that has been stacked, split, and allowed to dry under cover until it reaches 20% moisture content.

A **thermometer** is like a speedometer – it will tell you if you are burning hot enough or too hot.

Now we are ready to start a fire! Like anything else in life, starting a fire will be much easier and be more successful if we build a good foundation. I use plenty of newspaper. I ball it up and cover the entire base of the stove. I have been known to use the entire newspaper (but NOT the Sunday edition of the New York Times...). Then I use plenty of kindling. I lay down three or four layers of plenty of kindling in opposing directions so air can circulate through the layers. At this point I add a few small logs, because at this time there isn't much room to put in much more. To add a little insurance, I crumple up two or three more balls of newspaper and cram them in on top of the logs. I am assuming for this example that draft is present. With my match or lighter I light the paper on top first and then across the bottom. Now I can set the air control wide open and close the load door. An important point is that you should **NEVER** open your ash pan door to get the fire going. This can damage the stove and greatly reduce the useful life the stove. I leave the air control wide open until my thermometer reaches 400 degrees. The fire will burn robustly and do a great job of warming up the chimney and establishing a strong draft. At this point the kindling has probably burned down enough so I can add more wood. When this additional load had caught and I am still seeing a surface temperature of at least 400 degrees, I can now turn the air control down for an extended burn.