

How To Safely Construct and Burn Piles

12 Tips For Open Burning

1. Burn pile location is crucial. Do not build piles within 10 feet of trees. Do not build piles on steep slopes or near any structures. Do not build piles near concentrated branches, dead brush, or downed trees. There should be a clearing of mineral soil around your pile.

Having a cleared and open space will become essential for controlling the fire. Always leave yourself an out!

2. Build your piles 4'x4'x4' in circumference. Your slash should be 4' in diameter (or less), dry, tall & compact, and covered. Poorly constructed piles, *green wood*, and/or fuels greater than 4' in diameter will take more time to burn. All pile burning will need to be completed (mopped up and completely out) prior to sunset.

Poorly constructed piles will smolder, take more effort to mop up, and add frustration. Only burn natural debris (no trash, fuel, or waste).

3. Proper Protective Equipment (PPE), tools, and fire fighting equipment are essential. Try not to wear down jackets, sneakers, yoga pants, or any favorite clothing. Embers and smoke could ruin your day. Instead: dungarees, jeans, work/hiking boots, cotton shirts and leather gloves will serve best. Rakes, shovels, chainsaw, and a direct water source (garden hose/water tank/buckets) are a good contingency plan. Snow is your best friend.

Ruined clothing and out of control fires are caused by lack of planning. Pile burning should be a fun family event, and take minimal effort to control. Take your time and triple check the weather. When in doubt, don't guess. Just wait until you can be sure.

4. Engage your family! Kids love to pick up sticks while adding to your family's success. Stewardship starts early and can add a lifetime of rewarding possibilities.

Teachable moments are great for building stewardship. Tree species identification, planning your next phase of mitigation, and just being in the outdoors can make your decision to live amidst the forest worth all of your hard work.

5. The best time to burn piles is in the winter, when it is snowing, or snow is already present. Again, taking your time to build dry and compact piles, while covering them, will set yourself up for success.

Snow does not ignite. Your pile burning should take minimal effort, and ease concerns of your neighbors and community.

6. Covering burn piles. The best method is to use old roofing tin. 3'x3' tin square, will help with keeping your piles dry, with ignition, radiating the heat to melt the snow quicker, and serve as a shield if the wind increases. Cardboard works well too. Pile covering should be done prior to burn operations to minimize moisture from affecting your burn.

Do not use tarpaper, plastic painters tarps, or any other caustic material. Remember stewardship!

7. If your piles are covered and dry, you might be able to ignite them with wadded paper. Drip torches and propane weed burners work best. Do not use straight gas. Mix with diesel or kerosene 50/50.

Many professional tools and equipment can be purchased through forestry supply. Drip torches, 5-gallon bladder bags, and forestry tools are great investments, while making pile burning much easier.

8. Do not burn without a local permit. Pile-burning permits are easy to obtain. It's also a great opportunity to meet your local Fire Prevention team, ask questions, and build a lasting rapport.

Nearly 90% of all wildland fires are human caused. Taking the time to exchange questions and answers, with a local fire professional, is good stewardship.

9. Always check your local weather forecast prior to your projected burn day, the day of, before you ignite your first pile, and throughout your pile burning operations. Remember to call in your burn permit to central dispatch, prior to ignition. Dispatch may not track weather so they might not tell you if it's safe to burn. Safe burn ops are YOUR responsibility.

Every year, dozens of pile burning operations get out of control, and tie up emergency resources and their response times.

10. Let your neighbors know you plan to burn. All eyes will be on you while you're constructing piles, and during burn operations. Try to burn during inclement weather. Your success will become others chance for stewardship.

There are many communities that do not feel comfortable with pile burning. Education is key. Your excessive slash is either going to be burned, chipped, or removed by hauling it away. Hauling out all your slash is expensive and time consuming. Burning and chipping is the most efficient way to remove excess fuel. When burn piles are done well your neighbors will ask how you did it. Welcome to stewardship!

11. It's best to begin your pile burning operations at first light while the relative humidity is high and the wind is low. Good pile construction will have no problem burning during early hours.

It's recommended that one person control one pile at a time. A good practice is to feed that as it burns down.

12. If you are uncertain, do not burn. That is your intuition telling you that something is not right. Contact your local Fire Department and ask questions. Many communities have retired or active firefighters living amongst them. Ask them for help ahead of time.

Again, pile burning should take minimal effort. It should be fun. It should be rewarding. The only dumb question is the one not asked. Check the weather. Check the weather. Check the weather. Winter and snow is your friend. Wind is not.