

Simple Home Defense Punji Sticks



The most important part of defense in a survival situation is keeping you and your family from being injured or killed. Even minor injuries from a knife blade or bullet could result in deadly infections and weakness that could deal slow, painful death. Therefore, when possible you should use simple earthen defenses for protection and various deadly traps such as punji sticks to wound and kill enemies before you have to face them.

Disclaimer: traps like these are highly illegal in almost every state, so show good judgement in any practice construction. Furthermore, realize that these have been used against modern armies complete with battlefield surgeons and access to battlefield medical care. As such, they are made to rapidly cause grievous wounds and death and should be treated with the proper respect at all times. Properly used in the right context these can be formidable barriers against gangs of looters and thugs, but they are also extremely dangerous if you're careless.

A history of area denial with punji sticks



The North Vietnamese used punji sticks to great effect against the large and powerful American armed forces.

Punji sticks are a catch-all term for a variety of traps involving sharpened stakes of wood or bamboo that are used to rip, tear, and impale enemies. They fall under a group of traps referred to as “area denial weapons”, which are designed to prevent enemy forces from travelling across a specific area of land safely. Like barbed wire, landmines, caltrops and other weapons, punji sticks are designed to prevent or slow the movement of bad guys trying to gain access to important areas such as your retreat or campsite. They are also used to deny the enemy use of important highways and roads by slowing the flow of traffic so much that the added speed of a cleared road is negated completely.

Punjis were used with great effectiveness against American troops in Vietnam; in fact, some 10-11% of all casualties on the American side during the initial years of the war were caused by these booby traps. Indeed, the use of traps was designed specifically to overcome the advantages of American air superiority, armored support, and equipment by targeting patrols, infantry, and transport vehicles. These traps were often specifically designed to wound rather than kill, both to destroy American morale and to give plenty of mutilated GIs for the news media to show to the families back home.

Use in home defense

Although you’re not a member of the Viet Cong trying to defeat an army complete with flights of napalm dropping bombers and artillery support, in a disaster you may have large groups of looters and scum that will travel through your area looking for homes to plunder. As previously noted, you don’t want to face them head-on unless you have to and so traps like punji sticks are highly recommended to drive them away before a fight even materializes.

When defending a retreat, there are 3 primary ways that punji sticks of various kinds should be used:

* Placed at important roads and junctions in order to form a formidable barrier to entry. If you live in a subdivision that might be the main roads in and out of your neighborhood: if you live in the country it might be just a single winding gravel road. Obviously using major geographical points like gates in walls and passes through hills/mountains are also great locations for denial of entry. Regardless of the location, both the road itself and the nearby ground around it should have many traps set around it to prevent the entry of looters to begin with. These should be the kind of traps designed to disable vehicles and slow groups of people. A few single-man traps should also be used to deter scouts and solo looters, but generally the focus here is on vehicles and groups of people.

* To deny access to the immediate area around your retreat/campsite. Here you're looking to create a situation where your group knows which way to go and be safe when entering/leaving your campsite, but surprise attackers will themselves be surprised when they are suddenly falling into pits or being impaled by sticks. The more permanent your settlement the more elaborate and intricate your system of traps can be, but at least a few basic one-man traps can add a level of security to your dwelling.

* To turn concealment or cover into a deathtrap. This is done as an addition to an active defensive firefight, unlike the other two methods which were designed to drive off enemies without you needing to engage them. In this case you're looking to make sure that cover that could be used against your retreat is denied to your enemies. If a pile of metal and garbage would make good cover, for example, you would setup a few traps to hit a man diving behind it to protect himself from your gunfire. This has a twofold advantage, since you thin enemies out to start with and then keep them from protecting themselves properly afterwards. A particularly meticulous group might even set things up to drive enemies forward towards you, then have a final layer of traps in the open field to pin the looters down in an ideal killing zone and have a few molotov cocktails on standby if they decide to run.

How to build punji stick traps

The essentials of a punji stick trap is the sharpened, fire hardened stakes that do the damage. There are 3 kinds of traps that are most commonly used:

1. The pitfall trap. These are very flexible depending on how many people you need to harm with a single trap. If you have a large area of easily dug soil, you could dig a large pit suitable for many people running across at once and fill it with vertical stakes to impale them on. For traps designed to harm a single person, you can choose whether you want to merely wound or to quickly kill.



A wounding punji trap should have stakes at side angles to trap a leg and cause a great deal of muscle damage.

Deterrent pitfall traps are usually better served by wounding, since the group will have to force the grunts that will take the punishment from further traps to endure mutilation, blood loss, and death by infection. Unless the group is truly desperate or fanatical, most looters won't see the advantage in looting a single house or two in exchange for half a dozen screaming, dying men. These pits should be smaller, designed to sink in only a single leg so that it can potentially be broken when the person falls, and the sticks should be angled down to rip up skin and muscle when the person tries to escape the trap. This forces other members to dig him out if they want to avoid injuring him further, and he'll probably still impale his leg on a few sticks when he falls. All of the sticks should be thoroughly coated in a medley of potent and painful poisons and infection agents as well such as human feces. If you can find enough venomous serpents nearby, their venom is designed to work in the bloodstream and can be quite debilitating. As final icing on the cake, you can also cut barbs into the sticks, so that pulling out a stake will rip and tear muscle as it is removed. The key here is maximum cruelty: you want to make sure that after the first guy falls into a hole no one else will want to take one step further.



A killing trap should have vertical spikes in order to hit the enemy with the most sticks.

Killing pitfall traps are better for determined or desperate enemies who may not be stopped by even severe wounding. These are much simpler in design, typically made

large enough for at least one man to fall into, with stakes placed vertically at the bottom and angled upwards on the sides to maximize impalement. Barbs and poisons are optional here, though still strongly recommended since humans are capable of surviving truly horrific wounds sometimes. Adding a few feces-smearred barbs to a stomach impalement wound pretty much guarantees a kill in a world without competent medical care.



A trap like this is both demoralizing and extremely deadly.

2. The “Whiplash” trap. These are any kind of trap that involves a punji stick flung at an enemy by force. To get an idea of what we’re talking about, imagine the old “stepping on a rake and slamming the handle into your face” gag, but add a spear to the end of that handle flying into your skull. To combat thick-soled boots, many of these traps are also designed to snap up from the side, impaling the lower leg. Another design involves pulling a tree branch back, loading it with a sharp stake at chest level, then securing it to a tripline of some kind. When someone wanders by, they trip the wire and get a footlong spear shoved into them by the force of the branch snapping back into place. Killing or wounding designs are basically the same with the only difference being where you aim it, and both barbs and poisons are typically used on these. The primary use of these traps is to keep enemies from feeling safe, since it’s not just underground pits that could harm them. Furthermore, they can be hidden in places where a hole cannot be dug like a paved road. A light coating of dead leaves, a few “rake handle” traps hidden underneath, and someone is going to get a spear in the head.



This photo from Vietnam shows an entire field covered in buried punji sticks.

3. Buried punji trap. Rather than digging a pit and expecting a looter to fall into it, you can simply bury a punji stick upright in the ground and camouflage, waiting for some unsuspecting scum to shove his foot through it. These are generally wounding traps, though if you added other logs or debris to trip people up, you could design a field of punjis that would kill falling enemies by impaling them as they fell. These are great for deterring vehicle traffic too, since they will generally punch through rubber tires. If you have a place where people would be tempted to run (across an open field to cover, for example) or dive (behind cover or concealment) these can be used to discourage that pretty quickly.

How to keep yourself from dying to your own traps

The best way would be to just learn where everything was and avoid the traps, but if you must a map of the surrounding area with all traps carefully marked might be a good idea. Just remember to keep that map inside the main camp/retreat at all times, since you don't want a scout to be captured and give up the locations of all your traps. Aside from that I would not recommend marking the areas where you have place traps with markings of any kind, so that looters can't figure out the system.

It is sad to have to contemplate horribly maiming or killing people even in self defense, but that doesn't mean that you have the luxury of ignoring the option should things go south. Be sure you are ready to defend your resources and the lives of your family by any means necessary.