
29 HOMEMADE DIY FIRE STARTERS (TRIED AND TESTED)

I used to think that bringing fire starters camping was “cheating.” Now, I’ve realized that it’s actually smart. Using fire starters means I can make a fire with wet wood or even in the rain.

There are many ways to make fire starters at home, but they all have the same components: a wick and fuel.

By itself, a wick won’t burn for a long time. You also need a fuel source for your DIY fire starters. Lighting the wick will draw the fuel into the flame, creating a strong and long-lasting flame.

The wick for your DIY fire starter can be anything that will burn easily, such as cotton balls, dryer lint, torn paper, or sawdust. As for fuel, Vaseline and wax are the best options.



Materials for making DIY fire starters

I made and tested 29 variations of homemade fire starters. Here is how they performed and their pros/cons.



My homemade fire starters ready for testing.

Vaseline Based DIY Fire Starters

All of these fire starters use Vaseline as their fuel source. You can rub the Vaseline directly onto the wick. Or melt Vaseline in a double boiler and pour it onto the wick. If you don't have Vaseline, other petroleum-based products, such as Chapstick, will also work.

While they aren't waterproof (keep them in a baggie!), Vaseline fire starters ignite quickly and have a long burn time. They are also the easiest and cheapest fire starters to make.

1: Lint/Cotton Ball Vaseline Packets



Burn Time: 7 Minutes

These are my go-to DIY fire starter. You rub a bunch of Vaseline onto a cotton ball or some dryer lint. Wrap it in a packet, put it in a waterproof bag, and it's ready to be lit.

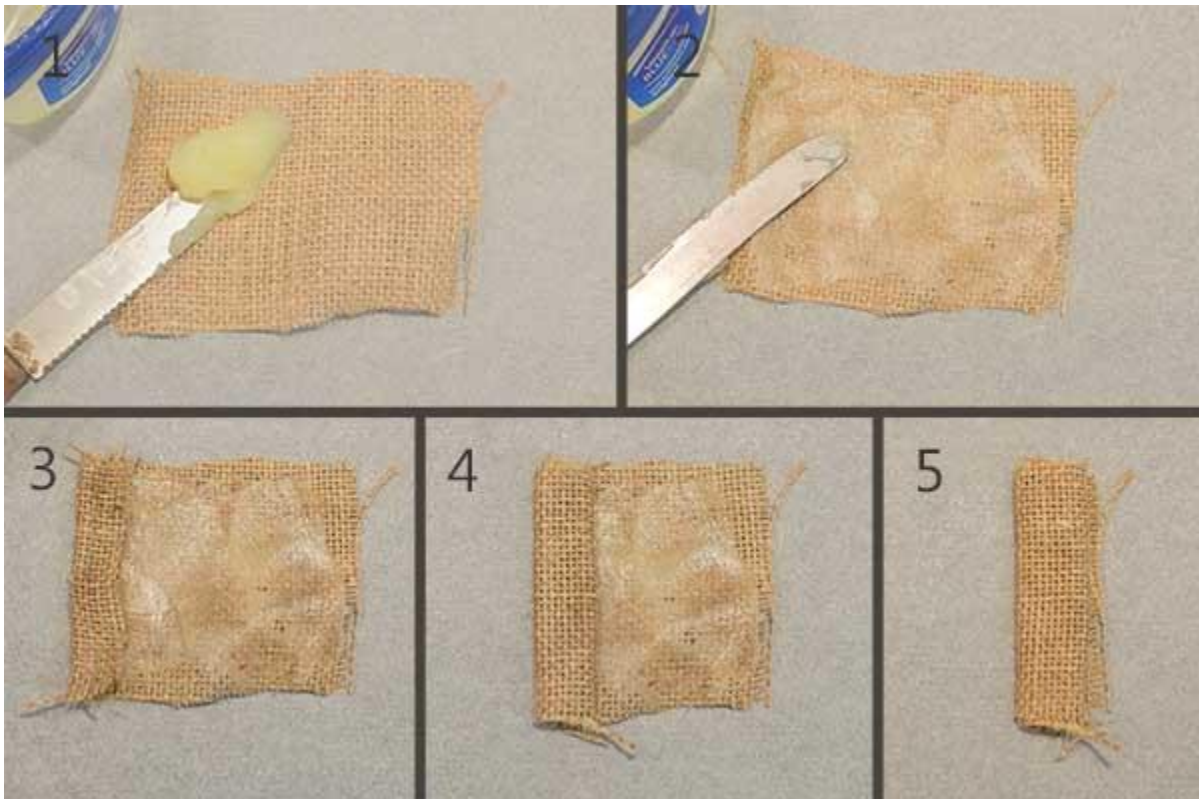
Pros:

- Inadvertently moisturize hands while making
- Easy to make
- Adjustable size
- Good burn time

Cons:

- Often get fuzz all over your fingers when making
- Get Vaseline on fingers when it's time to light

2: Burlap Cigars



Burn Time: 7 Minutes

I was sick of getting Vaseline all over my fingers, so I devised this method of making fire starters. You rub Vaseline onto a piece of burlap, as you would butter on bread. I have a dedicated knife for these tasks. Then roll it up.

These are not as messy to make as other DIY fire starters, and it doesn't get your hands dirty when you touch them. I also like how it burns slowly from the end – a slow burn is often better than a quick burn when starting a fire.

Pros:

- Not messy to make
- Don't get hands greasy when you touch them
- Slow burn

Cons:

- Need burlap

3-5: Egg Carton Vaseline Fire Starters (Cotton, Sawdust & Dryer Lint)



Burn Time: 6-9 Minutes

To make these fire starters, fill empty egg cartons with flammable materials. I used cotton, dryer lint, and sawdust. Melt the Vaseline in a double boiler, then pour it onto the material.

Once the Vaseline cools, cut the egg carton into individual fire starters. Since your hands never touch the Vaseline, it's not as messy as other methods.

An empty can work well for melting Vaseline. I have a camping pot holder, which I used to pour the Vaseline from the can.

Pros:

- Hands don't get messy
- Good burn time
- Not too bulky

Cons:

- Carton can get wet and make it hard to light
- Size not adjustable

6-8: Muffin Tin and Vaseline Fire Starters (Shredded Paper, Sawdust & Dryer Lint)



Burn Time: 7-15 Minutes

Instead of egg cartons, you can use muffin tins to make Vaseline fire starters. Line muffin tins with parchment or wax paper. Fill them with flammable materials – I used shredded paper, sawdust, and dryer lint.

Because muffin tins are so big, you need a lot of Vaseline, but the burn time is very long. The sawdust and dryer lint fire starters burned longer than the ones with shredded paper.

Pros:

- Hands don't get messy
- Very long burn time

Cons:

- Use lots of materials
- Do you need that long of a burn time?

- Take a while to light
 - Size not adjustable
 - Messy cleanup if Vaseline leaks into muffin tins
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Wax-Based DIY Fire Starters

DIY wax fire starters work pretty well. They take a while to ignite but, once they get going, have a long burn time. Because wax is waterproof and coats the wick material, these fire starters also become waterproof. The major downside is that you need to melt the wax – which can be incredibly messy.

9: Wax-Coated Matches



Burn Time: Less than 1 Minute

These are good emergency fire starters to keep around in case your lighter fails. It's annoying to dip individual matches into the melted wax,

though (I used a pair of tongs to do it). Instead, I recommended getting a book of matches and dipping the entire thing into the wax.

Pros:

- Waterproof
- Good backup fire starter

Cons:

- Time-consuming to dip individual matches
 - Short burn time
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10: Burlap or Jute String Bundles in Wax



Burn Time: 5-6 Minutes

Most of the time, you probably don't need a fire starter that will burn strong for 15 minutes. In those cases, these smaller DIY wax fire starters are great.

You take some burlap or a small bundle of jute string and dip it into melted wax. The flame is small but steady for at least 5 minutes. They ignite easier than other wax fire starters and are easy to pack.

Pros:

- Packable
- Adjustable size

- Don't require a lot of wax

Cons:

- Small flame
 - Need tongs to dip into wax
 - Messy dripping when making
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11. Tea Bags Dipped in Wax



Burn Time: 9 Minutes

I've seen these DIY fire starters recommended in many places. They worked surprisingly well. The burn time for the size was also ideal.

Compared to the other wax fire starters, these were the easiest to make because you just dip the tea bag into the melted wax and set it on

parchment paper to dry. There was still some messy dripping, but the cleanup wasn't bad.

Pros:

- Good burn time
- Packable
- Easy to make

Cons:

- Messy dripping when making
 - Waste of tea
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12. Pinecone Fire Starter



Burn Time: 13 Minutes

Pinecone fire starters are really popular online. They are usually decorative and made with colored wax, string, and essential oils.

Mine looked ugly, but they worked surprisingly well and smelled better than the others.

They are too bulky for me to take camping, but decorative pinecone fire starters would make a nice gift for someone with a wood stove.

Pros:

- Can use indoors
- Smell nice
- Lots of ways to decorate

- Make a nice gift when decorated

Cons:

- Takes a lot of effort to make them look pretty!
- Very bulky

13-15: Egg Carton Wax Fire Starters (Cotton, Dryer Lint & Sawdust)



Burn Time: 7-11 Minutes

Instead of dipping your wick into wax, you can pour melted wax directly over it. The easiest way to do this is to put your wick material (I used cotton balls, dryer lint, and sawdust) directly into an egg carton, then pour the wax over it.

Pros:

- Less messy than dipping into wax
- Long burn time
- Not too bulky

Cons:

- Carton can get wet and make it hard to light
 - Size not adjustable
 - Need a strong flame to get going
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16-18: Muffin Tin Wax Fire Starters (Shredded Paper, Dryer Lint & Sawdust)



Burn Time: 12+ Minutes

With these fire starters, you line a muffin tin with wax or parchment paper, fill it with flammable materials – I used shredded paper, dryer lint, and sawdust –and pour the wax on top. Fold down the edges of the paper to make a little packet.

Pros:

- Less messy than dipping into wax
- Very long burn time

Cons:

- Size not adjustable
- Probably bigger than you need
- Need a strong flame to get going

- Bulky to carry
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Other DIY Fire Starters

19-20: Hand Sanitizer Fire Starters (Cotton & Cork)

Burn Time: Didn't ignite

Hand sanitizer has a high percentage of ethanol alcohol in it. So, it makes sense that it could be used as a DIY fire starter. Many people have success with it: you can squirt it directly onto a cotton ball or your DIY tinder. Or you can soak things like wine corks in the hand sanitizer.

However, **these did NOT work for me**. The cork wouldn't light at all. The cotton just started smoldering: burning slowly but without any visible flame.

It probably has to do with the type of hand sanitizer I used. Many have gel which prevents them from burning well.

On top of this, there are some risks and other issues with using hand sanitizer as a Firestarter – so I don't recommend it.

21. Duct Tape Fire Starter

Burn Time: 1 Minute

Duct tape technically does work as a fire starter, but I wouldn't recommend using it unless it's an absolute emergency.

The problem is that duct tape has an outer layer made of plastic. It will melt instead of burn. It smells terrible and leaves a gross residue (you wouldn't want that in a wood-burning stove, for example).

Pros:

- Good emergency option

Cons:

- Smells bad
- Leaves plastic residue
- There are better survival uses for duct tape!

DIY Fire Starters that DON'T Work

22-24: Baby Oil Fire Starters (Cork, Cotton & Cardboard Strips)

To make these, you soak a flammable material in baby oil. In theory, baby oil should act as a good fuel source. However, I was unable to get these fire starters going. Maybe this would work better with another type of oil, but overall, it was a failure.

25-26: Vodka Fire Starters (Cork & Cotton)

I've seen Vodka recommended as a DIY fire starter online but doubted it would work. I was right: neither the cork nor the cotton ball would ignite.

27: Sawdust Paper Log

To make a sawdust "log," you put sawdust into a piece of paper and roll it up. It's annoying from the start because the log can easily unroll – meaning you end up with sawdust everywhere. The fire starter also didn't work as expected: the sawdust smoldered but never ignited.

28: Dryer Lint and Toilet Paper Roll Fire Starter

To make a "lint log," you stuff dryer lint into toilet paper rolls. They end up being completely free to produce. You can wrap them in parchment paper to make them more waterproof.

In theory, these fire starters should work (and are hyped up all over the net), but mine was a big fail.

Bear in mind that most of our clothes are made out of synthetics. Most synthetics will melt or smolder but not burn. I maybe could have gotten the lint log going if I had held my lighter there longer. But, the lighter got too hot: at that point, I'm better off lighting my tinder sticks directly!

This would work if you used lint from 100% natural fibers. Even so, the lint logs are huge and impractical to carry. I'd rather rub a bit of lint in Vaseline. It would burn longer and take up a fraction of the space!

29: Cardboard Dipped in Wax

Since other DIY wax fire starters work so well, I thought dipping cardboard into wax might also work.

I was wrong: the wax started melting when I tried to light the cardboard. It was a drippy mess. I gave up since it makes no sense to hold a lighter against your fire starter for so long!

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