

## Wilderness Way Tips by Tamarack Song

### Smokeless Fire

Is there anything more irritating than a smoky fire? Yes, it could be argued that black flies, unrelenting heat, or any of a number of other nuisances are worse. And yet, those all pass with their season. Smoky fire is different – it is literally in your face every time you cook over it or wish to sit around it on a leisurely evening.

The good news is that smoky fire is much easier to take care of than those other annoyances, even when wood is wet and burning conditions are not the best. One mistake we usually make is to think that more is better, i.e., if it's not burning well, pile more on. The other mistake is the mind-over-matter approach – I'll force this fire to do what I want it to do. And we all know what these lead to – frustration, anger, contempt – not to mention a bigger, smokier fire.

What I do is to become the fire and ask, "What do I need to dance high, bright, and hot?" From that perspective, the answers come much easier. Here are some ideas that should help in most conditions.

#### **To start a smokeless fire**

- Avoid pits; choose a level or slightly elevated location.
- Use only as much tinder as absolutely needed.
- Build small-diameter, tepee-shaped fire.
- Start small, gradually adding fuel.

Small-diameter wood is better than large because of its increased burning surface and its ability to rapidly heat and dry.
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#### **To maintain a smokeless fire**

- Use finger-sized wood, of short length.
- Keep burning wood upright.
- Add wood gradually, as it is consumed.
- Keep space between wood.
- Flip smoldering ends into fire.

#### **To use wet wood**

- Split down to small diameter.
- Discard wet bark and outer wet wood.
- Pre-dry around fire.
- Burn on hot fire or with dry wood.

If a fire is made right, there is no need to fan it or blow on it – unless your goal is to asphyxiate those across from you! When a fire starts smoking, it's usually best to strip it down
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