

# Making Fire with a Bow Drill

By Dino Labiste



The components of the bow drill consist of the spindle, the hearthboard, bow and the bearing block.

Downward pressure is applied by pushing down on the bearing block and rotation on the spindle is generated by the bow.

In the right hand photo above, notice that the string closest to the left hand holding the bow is underneath the other half of the string. The left thumb is used to push down on the string to separate the string as the spindle is rotating. This keeps the string from abrading each other. Also in the right hand photo above, the right wrist is locked into the shin of the right leg to stabilize the rotating spindle.



Place a leaf underneath the notch to catch the char dust.

Use a consistent sawing motion to create some char build-up in the notch. Continue to rotate the spindle as the hearthboard begins to smoke and the char dust ignites into a ember.



Transfer the glowing ember from the leaf to the the tinder bundle. The white, cattail down in the tinder bundle of the above, left photo will help to extend the fire of the ember. Blow into the tinder bundle to increase the fire of the ember.



Continue blowing until the tinder bundle bursts into flames.

The spindle was California Buckeye. The hearthboard was Incense Cedar. The wooden bow was willow and the string was made from Flax. The bearing block was from a piece of soapstone. The tinder bundle was from the bast fibers of cottonwood with some cattail down in the middle.