

Making Fire with a Hand Drill

by Dino Labiste



Spindle rotation and downward pressure are two of the most important requirements for starting a hand drill fire. To guide beginners, who are first learning to do a hand drill fire, a leather thong with thumb loops can help apply the downward pressure that is necessary for creating the needed friction.



After you get the feel of the downward pressure by using the thong, try using the hand drill without the leather thong. Practice and patience will eventually improve your rate of success.



There are a variety of ways in preparing your notches. The notch in the photo above was cut tangent to the circle of the spindle hole on the hearthboard. Two V-shaped notches were cut on the top and bottom of the hearthboard for catching the char dust.



When you begin to see smoke coming from the spindle and hearthboard, don't think that you have a fire and stop spinning the hand drill. Be sure that the char dust has ignited before you stop rotating the spindle.



A leaf was placed under the hearthboard to catch the ignited char dust. The glowing ember was dropped into the cattail down in the tinder bundle. The bundle was constructed of the bast fibers of cottonwood and a pile of cattail down placed in the middle.



Blow into the cattail down to help extend the ignited char. Once the coal starts to spread, it helps to hold the tinder bundle out and above your head to keep the smoke from getting into your eyes.



Continue blowing into the tinder bundle until it ignites into a flame.