

How to make newspaper logs for your fire

by [bauble](#) on October 25, 2008

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Intro: How to make newspaper logs for your fire

You can make fuel for your fire by using newspapers. This instructable shows you how to make a newspaper log in less than two minutes. The video shows you the whole process.

It's kind of like hardcore paper mache. To get a solid log, you must change the structure of the newspaper. That is from sheets to pulp. Usually there's no shortcuts in paper mache, but you'll learn how to make these logs very quickly using a rubber mallet.

The paper logs burn best when combined with wood. They will create more ash than wood. The hole through the middle will help it to burn and make the drying out process quicker.



Step 1: Prepare the newspapers

You will need newspapers, a strong bucket, a rubber mallet and a dowel about an inch thick. You will also need a concreted/cemented area to work on. Fold the newspapers and put 3 or 4 into the bucket and cover with water. The newspapers will probably float to the top so put a piece of wood on the papers.

If you have a leaky gutter with a bucket under the drip or collect rainwater in a tank it would be a great idea to use rain water for the logs.

The newspapers in this instructable were soaked for two days. One day is enough. If you want to speed up the softening process put a squirt of cheap detergent in the water.

wingbatwu suggested adding flour to the water which sounds like a really good way of helping everything bind together.



Image Notes

1. The bucket only has a little bit of water. Keep adding water until the newspapers are covered.

Step 2: It's hittin' time

If you ever feel the need to hit something instead of somebody, now is the time. Get a wet newspaper out of the bucket, letting some water drain off it first. Lay it out on a hard surface like cement.

Starting at the top of the newspaper, hit it with the mallet and work your way down until you've done it all. Not too hard or the newspaper will fall apart. Now carefully lift the mashed newspaper from one side and flip it over. Now hit the other side with the rubber mallet.

If you hit the first side too hard you will find it hard to flip the newspaper over. Just turn what you can and piece it back together.



Image Notes

1. This half of the newspaper has already been mashed with the mallet.

Step 3: Rolling and squeezing

Your dowel should be longer than the width of the newspaper. Place it at the end of the newspaper nearest to you. Curl the paper around it and start to roll it on. As you roll you need to squeeze at the same time. This compresses everything into a log.

When you finish, you'll need to make sure that you press the end of the newspaper into the log so that it doesn't unravel.



Image Notes

1. Curl the edge of the paper around the dowel and start rolling.
2. Squeeze the log as you roll to compress it all together.

Step 4: Tidy up the ends

When the log is complete, spend a few seconds squeezing and shaping it with your hands to get it as solid as possible. When you have finished rolling and squeezing the log turn it up on its end. Slide the log down to the end of the dowel so that it is resting on the ground. Use your thumbs to press in on the ends of the log to make it neat. Repeat at other end.

Remove the dowel



Image Notes

1. Apply pressure with thumbs to tidy up the end of the log.

Step 5: Finished/dirty hands

There's your finished newspaper log. Now look at your hands. The photo shows what my hand looked like after making three logs. If you make about eight in one session your hands will be really black.

Put the logs in the sun to dry. It depends on the weather how long they'll take to dry. The logs I made for this instructable dried in one day. But it was a hot day (30c/86f). If you're making them in cool weather it could take two weeks if there's no sun.

Update, 10th November 2008: I have mentioned in the comments section that once the fire season starts you can get your logs dry within a few days by stacking them on top of the wood heater or in front of an open fire. There is a photo in the comments.

If the weather is lousy, but you haven't yet had any fires you can make use of a well aired spot. If you keep your firewood under cover, it would also be a good place to dry your paper logs. In cool cloudy weather I make a space for the logs to sit for as long as it takes. I put an old screen door on some boxes and use that as a drying rack. Air can get to the logs from underneath. Any area that gets the wind but is protected from the rain will do fine if you can afford to wait a couple of weeks for them to dry.

It's surprising how hard they are when they're dry. If you tap yourself on the head with one, you'll see what I mean.

You really need to make a whole lot of them before winter. Otherwise it will be too cloudy and cold. At the beginning you will probably love making them, so take advantage of this and make as many as you can. After a while your enthusiasm will wear off and it will turn into a chore especially if you're out in the cold and your hands are freezing while you play around with cold wet newspaper.

But anyway... good luck if you decide to make them. Your firewood will last a lot longer.



Step 6: Paper log tweaks

handyman05 suggested:

» adding coffee grounds to the logs. This could make them give off more heat. The grounds could be sprinkled on top of the paper after it's been mashed on both sides. Then roll the logs up with the coffee grounds inside.

joeny1980 suggested:

» adding pine needles to the logs to add some crackling. The pine needles could make them burn hotter too.

» improving the appearance of the logs by wrapping in soaked brown paper like from a paper bag.

» adding coffee grounds or related coffee/tea product to the soaking water to give a brown tinge to the logs to make them look nicer.

Related Instructables



Newspaper Fireplace logs
(Photos) by pauly43



Turn newspapers & junk mail back into logs by trailleadr



Fruit Tree Newspaper Pot by gjenkins



How to open a beer bottle with a newspaper by Frederover



How to make a Coffee Fire Log by foxtrickle



Java Fire Log In A Used Paper Coffee Cup by Culturespy

Comments

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lebeef143 says:

Hi there,

I really like your idea and appreciate the concise way you have presented it. I'm wondering about the duration of the burn on these logs? How long do they burn if they are by themselves?

Jan 10, 2011. 1:23 PM [REPLY](#)



wingbatwu says:

I would add some flour to the water to make papier mâché glue

Dec 26, 2010. 8:40 PM [REPLY](#)



bauble says:

That's a really good idea. I'll add it to the instructable. Thanks.

Dec 27, 2010. 5:07 PM [REPLY](#)



joeny1980 says:

I read thru all the comments on here, some are pretty old so I didnt want to comment against them. I really like this idea, I like the idea of doing something to make them look better. For example wrap the last layer with a soaked brown paper bag - to make it look at least brown instead of white.

Dec 23, 2010. 9:52 AM [REPLY](#)

Someone suggested adding a layer of coffee grounds - i like that idea also. I wonder if you just dumped a few cups of used coffee grounds in the water if that would disperse well and sort of soak in. It may also help to dye the paper to a more natural color. I imagine it would give a nice smell when it burned and they mentioned it may help with achieving a better burning temperature.

I was thinking maybe tossing in some pine needles in between some of the layers to add some crackling.

There is alot of arguing on here about the environmental aspect of this and that burning paper is worse than wood, etc. But one point I didnt read - is that this isnt an alternative to wood necessarily... this is an alternative to a Duraflame (or other brand) log. Which as far as I know, those are made with pulp also. So rather than comparing this to wood - if you are environmentally conscious, I'd be curious how it compares to a Duraflame. Because thats all this is, a DIY Duraflame.



bauble says:

I love your idea of adding pine needles.

Dec 23, 2010. 9:36 PM [REPLY](#)

As for making the paper logs brown, maybe putting a cup of coffee or tea in the soaking water would help. Or used teabags. Your idea of the outer layer being wrapped in brown paper sounds like the most effective way though.

I will add the pine needle and brown paper ideas to one of the steps.



werfu says:

Using these as a fire started shouldn't be a problem, but would burning a lot of them cause creosote formation into the chimney? Newspaper burns at lower temperature than wood and release more soot and pollutants. I think something should be added to guaranty a high temperature burning. It would also improve it's fire starting capability.

Dec 23, 2010. 7:57 AM [REPLY](#)



bauble says:

Creote build up hasn't been a problem for me. The newspaper logs really are to burn with wood not instead of wood. So the flame from the wood should help minimize creosote build up.

Dec 23, 2010. 9:28 PM [REPLY](#)



danielflugt says:

This is brilliant! I was going to get a paper shredder for those sensitive documents (I don't like the idea of data on me lying on some landfill), but this is much better. I'd still recycle whenever possible though.

Dec 23, 2010. 12:32 PM [REPLY](#)



kraskoy says:

I am wondering if anyone has tried this with other types of paper? I'm trying to figure out what do with all all our paper feed sacks, and thinking this just might be the thing to do. They aren't as 'soft' as newspaper, but will they hold just as well? I currently tear them into 'balls' and use those to try to start the wood, but if I could make logs out them, it would probably be a lot easier. Thanks.

Nov 27, 2010. 11:01 AM [REPLY](#)



bauble says:

If you do try using the paper sacks, it might be worthwhile to soak them longer, maybe even a couple of days. And add a little bit of liquid soap/detergent to help soften the paper.

Nov 27, 2010. 6:44 PM [REPLY](#)

Perhaps you could make a newspaper log first so that you have a feel for how pulpy the paper gets after hitting with a mallet.

It is the pulpiness that helps it form into a log rather than just layers of paper.

I have found differences in newspapers though. It seems to me that some are on the 'hard' side and require more mallet action than others.

But if you successfully make a newspaper log then you'll know how much effort to put into the mallet when using the paper sacks.



DrewManchu says:

Nice! I like simple but efficient ideas! And working in the medical field, I always have a pair or two of latex gloves around to keep my hands clean!

Nov 16, 2010. 7:14 PM [REPLY](#)



cronama says:

what about drying it in an oven ,as if you where to dry clay

Sep 16, 2010. 5:10 PM [REPLY](#)



bauble says:

I don't know. I wouldn't try it as I would constantly worry about the paper catching fire once it had achieved a degree of dryness.

Sep 16, 2010. 5:39 PM [REPLY](#)



greenroofer says:

Jul 7, 2010. 7:41 AM [REPLY](#)

It's a very clever idea. I was put off by those pricey fancy briquettes makers. The mashing step can be therapeutic. Pity my log store is already full!



BonifaceJ says:

Apr 23, 2010. 1:30 PM [REPLY](#)

Would this work with shredded paper? My office goes through so much, if I made a mold and soaked the shreds a bit, then pressed it in, I wonder if that would work? I love using my fireplace and always have a shortage of logs, and my roses and blueberries like the extra ash I fold into their beds.



bauble says:

Apr 24, 2010. 2:26 AM [REPLY](#)

Hi, sounds like paper logs would be great for you. Shredded paper should work. But I think it would still need to be mashed with a mallet to make it pulpy. You could try either:

1. soak the shreds
also soak a newspaper
spread out the shreds inside 3 or 4 sheets of soaked newspaper (Sheets would be hard to peel apart though)

mash with mallet, turn over, mash, roll, squeeze, etc.

or

2. If you don't have a mallet and want to try your mold idea here is an excerpt from a comment of mine from 8 Nov 2008:

"I used to make paper logs a different way. It was slow and messy. I'd get a plant pot about 7 inches tall and put pre soaked sheets of newspaper in one at a time and ram it down with a two inch thick dowel. The water would seep out through the pot's drainage holes at the bottom."

So instead of mashing with a mallet I was tamping down with a dowel using a plant pot as a mold. The end result was good but it was very slow to do a good job. Then I put the pots with mashed newspaper in them out in the sun. After a few days the paper would have shrunk in away from the sides of the pot enough to shake the paper 'pot' out. Then more time drying.

Shredded paper should work a lot better and quicker using this method than newspapers did.

Good luck.



freejelly says:

Mar 20, 2010. 3:17 AM [REPLY](#)

I've also added used coffee grounds which I got from Starbucks in the logs to make Java Coffee Logs.

Before pulping the pages together, I sandwiched a layer of coffee grounds between a few sets of pages and then pulped them in together. Apparently coffee grounds burn hotter and cleaner.

You can also blend in other things like sawdust, toilet paper cores, egg containers etc...

Be creative. Try different things.



Phoghat says:

Dec 26, 2009. 3:36 AM [REPLY](#)

This is a good instructable.

We have had enough comments on whether they are good, bad or indifferent towards the ecology.

PLEASE STOP ARGUING you're giving me a headache.



I3owzaaaah says:

Mar 20, 2010. 2:52 AM [REPLY](#)

Not meaning to lash out or anything, (it's hard to get feelings across on the Internet), But I think if you had just left pickford to believe that this was harmful, this 'conflict' could have been prevented.



I3owzaaaah says:

Mar 20, 2010. 2:49 AM [REPLY](#)

To end this stupid argument, yes burning paper is harmful, but then so is burning anything. Yes, sometimes recycling isn't always what it seems. (In sense of recycle plants being full and paper going to land fills) No this is in no way 'wasteful'. And finally think of recycling as a privilege, if it's there use it, if not don't. I hope you guys stop arguing now. Kthxbi



freejelly says:

Mar 19, 2010. 10:02 PM [REPLY](#)

My wife does not like "toilet paper looking" white rolls sitting around the fireplace so I've started making them a bit more better looking by wrapping leaves, bark or other dried organic material in the final stage. I put a final coat of dried leaves or bark on the outside and the logs look more natural.

You have to try to stick the dried leaves and bark on tightly by pressing them into the pulped paper.

The look like real logs sitting next to your fireplace.

I will try to get some images.



bauble says:

Wow, what a great way to make them look better and use up your yard sweepings at the same time. That would be great if you can get some photos. I love your wife's comment.

Mar 20, 2010. 1:40 AM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

This seems wasteful and bad for the environment.

Dec 12, 2009. 8:57 PM [REPLY](#)



Phoghat says:

HOW?

Dec 13, 2009. 3:37 AM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

Well the news paper could be recycled instead and when you burn it the chemicals from the news paper are released into the air.

Dec 13, 2009. 1:39 PM [REPLY](#)



biffula says:

Pickford78,

Do some research and check figures. No chemical fumes given off from newspaper. They use soy ink now. Also, there are times that stuff you send to recycling ends up in the landfill anyway. It all depends on the market. If there is a glut of plastic or paper at any given time and prices are too low, the recycling center cant afford to store it until the price comes back up, so they just truck it off to the landfill anyway.

And as for hauling you recyclables to town if you live in the country? Puh-lease. That is not practical or environmentally friendly if you factor in the travel costs.

And as far as not burning them? Your also missing the point. This is instead of using wood. Not doing without a fire. Oh, and also, for some of you dolts out there, most firewood is cut from fallen trees anyway. There is plenty of it around and most is not cut from healthy, still live trees.

Dec 23, 2009. 12:38 PM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

I'm not speaking of the ink. The bleaching processes and such that the paper goes through in the pulp mills. And by not recycling the paper then you need to use more pulp in mills and if you have ever lived near one/ read any ground/ water samples near the area you would know that by needing more new paper your supporting all of that.

Dec 25, 2009. 10:43 PM [REPLY](#)



biffula says:

Well your talking pulp mills now. I thought we were talking about noxiousness of the actual burning of newspaper, of which is no worse than burning wood, regardless of whether bleach was used in the pulp process or not.

Jan 13, 2010. 7:50 AM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

as for the driving them to town... grocery runs? also you may want to talk about starting a local recycle program. I am for burning wood as it can actually be cleaner than the average diesel furnace. I cut fallen wood as well and burn it with proper conditions.

Dec 25, 2009. 10:46 PM [REPLY](#)



biffula says:

Fact is, burning wood is not good for the environment, nor is there enough wood for everyone to use it as an alternative.

Jan 13, 2010. 7:51 AM [REPLY](#)



Alpha2904 says:

What most people DON'T know is that recycling paper can actually hurt the environment more. The chemicals that are used in bleaching and re preparing the pulp in to making recycled paper is highly toxic and extremely deficient.

What do they do with all of the toxic waste? They put it in steel barrels to sit and rust on some toxic waste dump; Thus hurting the enviroment.

Unfortunately creating new paper is not nearly as bad, but the rate of deforestation it create is.

The solution: Go paperless to all means possible. Computers = Awesomeness!!! :P

And burning wood is yes cleaner than paper. But why not learn how to distill ethanol. It would be fun in the learning process. Ethanol burning carbon foot print is nearly non existant.

Jan 1, 2010. 10:59 PM [REPLY](#)



underwhelmed says:

And if you live somewhere without recycling, you will be burning gas to recycle the newspaper.

I live out in the country, and the local paper throws out a "free" version of their paper no one reads once a week, and a "local shopper" rag does the same. They will not stop, no matter the number of calls they receive, which is littering as far as I am concerned.

What chemicals are you referring to, newspapers use soy based inks now, and have in the US for about 10 years or so. The only other chemicals I can think of would be the bleach used to make the paper white.

Seems like a good use of resources for me, you might have an issue with it, but I don't really care.

Dec 13, 2009. 3:26 PM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

Well if you need to go to town you could take your recyclables with you. if your that far out where you can get everything in town, then i guess your right but for most towns I would recommend just recycling it.

Dec 13, 2009. 4:58 PM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

What will you use to light your fires if you don't want to use harmful chemicals?

Dec 13, 2009. 8:00 PM [REPLY](#)



pickford78 says:

wood shavings.

Dec 13, 2009. 10:53 PM [REPLY](#)



theone13 says:

Oh, ok pickford... I'll go cut down a perfectly good tree in order to get wood shavings rather than use wood from trees that are long dead.... Your logic is confusing me....

Dec 14, 2009. 7:03 PM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

I like your logistics.

Dec 14, 2009. 7:08 PM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

Really? No. Paper logs.

Dec 14, 2009. 6:52 AM [REPLY](#)



underwhelmed says:

You still didn't tell us what these "harmful chemicals" are in newspaper.

Dec 14, 2009. 2:31 AM [REPLY](#)

I don't think you can name any.



pickford78 says:

http://www.bc.lung.ca/airquality/wood_burning.html#top

Dec 25, 2009. 10:36 PM [REPLY](#)



underwhelmed says:

Yes, that is what chimneys are for. You shouldn't be sitting in smoke, get it outside of your home.

Dec 29, 2009. 9:00 AM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

lol I like your user name.

Dec 29, 2009. 10:53 AM [REPLY](#)



brandon borick says:

you just made me start burning plaistics

Dec 26, 2009. 1:26 PM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

Not in newspaper, gasoline, lighter fluid, etc.

Dec 14, 2009. 6:53 AM [REPLY](#)



yusufamir says:

finally ingediants for my curry, i thank u alot :)

Dec 15, 2009. 1:08 AM [REPLY](#)



Yerboogieman says:

I like chicken curry. Poisonous curry doesn't agree with my system very well.

Dec 26, 2009. 12:50 PM [REPLY](#)



Fieldownage says:

@pickford78

Dec 14, 2009. 3:44 AM [REPLY](#)

Well by burning either logs or newspapers you're still releasing CO2 into air so it topic end at there and newspapers are fairly clean from chemicals if you can recycle them with regular paper.



yusufamir says:
u look extremely tasty, just my my mothers curry :P

Dec 15, 2009. 1:06 AM [REPLY](#)



pheenix42 says:
Well done! Did you know that this is half the process of making so-called 'biomass briquettes' for fuel purposes? Stumbled onto it myself just today; shredded paper pulped the same way you describe here, mixed with sawdust (or similar), pressed into molds and then dried. Burns quite well!

Dec 31, 2009. 3:08 AM [REPLY](#)

Again, nice job!



ANDY! says:
I sorta made a canoe this way! Paper mache can be strong if made well.

Dec 28, 2009. 4:58 PM [REPLY](#)

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