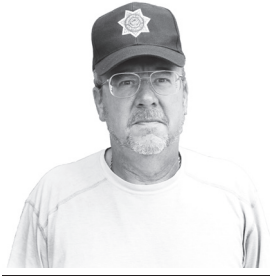


Fire starters 101



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

You may remember the blizzard that struck Eastern Colorado November of last year, shutting down all major and minor roads. It just happened to be the week I was out there hunting with my friends from J & D Outfitters.

Prior to the trip, I ditched my backpack for a small duffle, known as a “blind bag” to waterfowlers. Since I would be spending most of my time glassing in trucks and ATVs, a waterproof blind bag made more sense.

As I transferred all of my stuff to the bag, apparently, I forgot a few things. One was an ignition source for fire. I had no matches, lighter, or anything else to start a fire. None of my friends smoked, so they were matchless as well. The incident got me to thinking about what fire starters work, and what ones don't.

To start off, carry multiple sources of fire igniters. Carry them in several locations, different pants pockets, various places in your pack or blind bag. Make sure everyone in your party does likewise.

In an emergency situation, snowstorm, or just because it is cold, a warm fire is your friend. It is difficult to huddle next to a handwarmer during a blizzard, as I learned.

The three things a fire needs are heat, fuel, and oxygen. These three things work together to help a fire start and take over. However, if any of the three elements are removed from a fire, then it will no longer exist. I might add a fourth, something to start it with. There are several dozen methods of fire starting, some work well, others don't. Here is my brutally honest assessment of various methods of fire igniters.

Most common is the match. Cardboard match packs will work in a pinch, but they are not for the rugged life in the outdoors. The flint paper is useless when wet, as is the cardboard match. Seems I never need a fire when it is dry, so ditch the cardboard. Same goes for the “strike anywhere” wooden matches.

These matches are not of the same quality we grew up with. I wind up breaking more, and having more fail-to-fire matches, than those that actually work. The solution: windproof and waterproof matches. These come in a box of 25, have a couple extra flint strike pads, and burn around 20 seconds. They run about 5 bucks a box of 25, but they work. I carry a couple boxes (usually).

Then there is the good old butane lighter. These are terrific, unless it is

really cold, then the butane does not flow, and the lighter is useless. Solution is to keep one warm by carrying it in a pants pocket close to your body. I carry a few butane lighters in various pockets and packs (usually).

The flint and lighter fluid Zippo type lighters work well also. The only drawback is they run out of fuel, and I don't want to carry a can of lighter fluid around with me. Besides, I don't want my pack to smell like kerosene either.

A nine-volt battery and some fine steel wool will light up a fire. Touch the terminals of the battery to the steel wool, and it will heat up and ignite. You have to have super dry kindling for it to work, which might be tough to find in a snowstorm. Probably best to stick to other methods.

A person can also start a fire with a magnifying glass, focusing the sun's rays on a pile of very dry tinder. It can take some time and a steady hand to make it work. I vote no on this option because I usually need the fire in the dark, when there is no sun around. Probably should save the magnifying glass for the kids to fry ants on the driveway at home.

There are several methods of starting a fire using friction, such as a bow drill, hand drill, and a fire plow. These involve spinning a piece of hardwood on another piece of hardwood, near some very dry tinder until it ignites. You might have seen this method on television. All I ever



This is the answer in just about any survival situation, but you have to have something to start the fire with. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

got trying this method was exhausted. Probably should leave this method to the survival shows.

Metal matches work, using a magnesium bar and a steel striker. Scrape off some magnesium with your knife and use your knife on the scraper to make sparks. The sparks hit the magnesium, and poof...flames. Again, you need dry tinder, but a tube of cotton balls soaked in Vaseline will tinder up nicely. A metal match makes a nice backup in your pack but practice this a few times. You don't want your first attempt to be in an emergency.

You can make a fire from a piece of ice. Form a piece of ice into a lens shape using your hands. You must start with clear ice. Ice with clouds in it will not work. Once shaped, you use it the same way as a magnifying

glass. Again, you need sun to make it work. I would save this method to try for fun or a merit badge, but not in a survival situation.

If you ever find yourself in a four-alarm backwoods emergency, a mini flare is magical. Orion makes some, and they sell for less than ten bucks for two pack. You simply scratch the ignition surface on the top of the flare with the removed flare cap. Set the flare onto the wood in your fire pit, no kindling needed. The flare is waterproof and windproof and will even light damp wood. The flare burns about 5 minutes.

My blind bag now contains three butane lighters, 2 boxes of windproof and waterproof matches, and two flares. I even threw in a couple packs of WetFire tinder. Comes in waterproof packaging and gives

me a dry tinder, no matter what the weather. I will not make the mistake of forgetting fire starters again, although I am sure I will forget something else next time. It wouldn't be a normal hunting trip if I didn't forget something.

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Colorado saw an increase in human-bear conflicts in 2025; CPW provides bear media kit for news outlets

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Colorado Parks and Wildlife received 5,299 reports of sightings and conflicts with bears in 2025, which is 15% higher than the previous 6 years. Trash continues to be the number one source of conflicts between humans and bears.

Of the 5,299 reports CPW received in 2025, 2,448 resulted in property damage to a shed, garage, home, vehicle, fence, etc. Over 57% were linked to trash, 18% to livestock, chickens and beehives, and 16% to bird seed, pet food, barbeque grills, coolers and refrigerators.

CPW bear reporting system

In 2019, CPW launched a bear reporting system to help wildlife managers track and quantify bear activity and conflicts across the state. The data collected is used to see overall trends and identify sources of conflict on a localized, regional and statewide level. Since its implementation in April 2019, CPW has recorded 32,212 reports of sightings and conflicts with bears.

The data from the annual bear cycle informs CPW's wildlife managers where bears are at and what they are up to, helping CPW identify sources of conflict and make educated management decisions. If you see



Hummingbird feeders are a major attractant for bears that provide a high calorie food reward. Keep all food sources secured to reduce conflicts with bears. (Photo/CPW)

a bear causing trouble in an urban area, call CPW to report it.

Recapping bear reports from 2025

There are an estimated 17,000 to 20,000 bears in Colorado and every year the majority of incident reports involve bears trying to access human food sources. 2025 was no different with trash continuing to be the number one source of conflicts. Other constant sources of conflict included birdfeeders, livestock and bears accessing open garages and other human-originated items that are left unsecured. These conflicts could all easily be reduced if the public takes some simple steps around their homes and properties to prevent bears from accessing them.

Nature and human behavior play a role in the amount of bear activity that we see annually. Drought conditions and other factors that may influence the availability of natural food crops for bears, such as a late freeze, vary across the state, as does the behavior of people when it relates to human-bear interactions.

In 2025, Colorado experienced varying levels of human-bear conflicts, with some areas seeing increases while others saw declines. Natural food conditions were inconsistent across the state, influenced by localized droughts, late frosts, and variable precipitation. Some regions, particularly those with poor acorn and berry production,

See BEAR page B3

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