

A Neighborhood Experiment - Making Our Own Charcoal

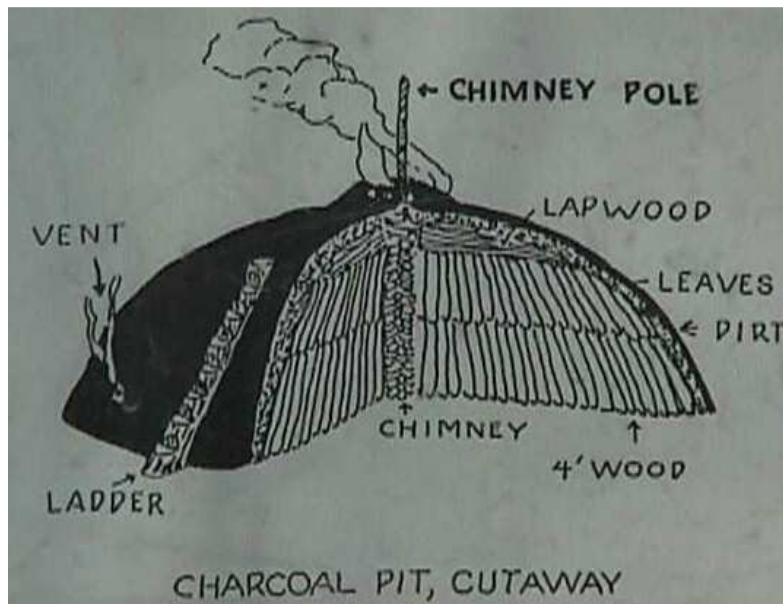


Aah – charcoal that mainstay to summer cook-outs. Charcoal is a formless mass of carbon and can be made from most carbonaceous materials. It is one of the oldest of man-made fuels and has been prepared by nature under the ground for a thousand years. Charcoal is still a major source of energy throughout the world. There are however, as always, some advantages and disadvantages to lump charcoal.



Advantages

- Lump charcoal is an all-natural, 100 percent hardwood product with no additives.
- Natural charcoal heats faster than briquettes, so food can be cooked over natural charcoal within 5 to 7 minutes after lighting.
- Lump charcoal can be lit sans lighter fluid and with just a match and some newspaper which means no off-flavors.
- One pound of hardwood charcoal produces the equivalent heat of two pounds of briquette charcoal.



Disadvantages

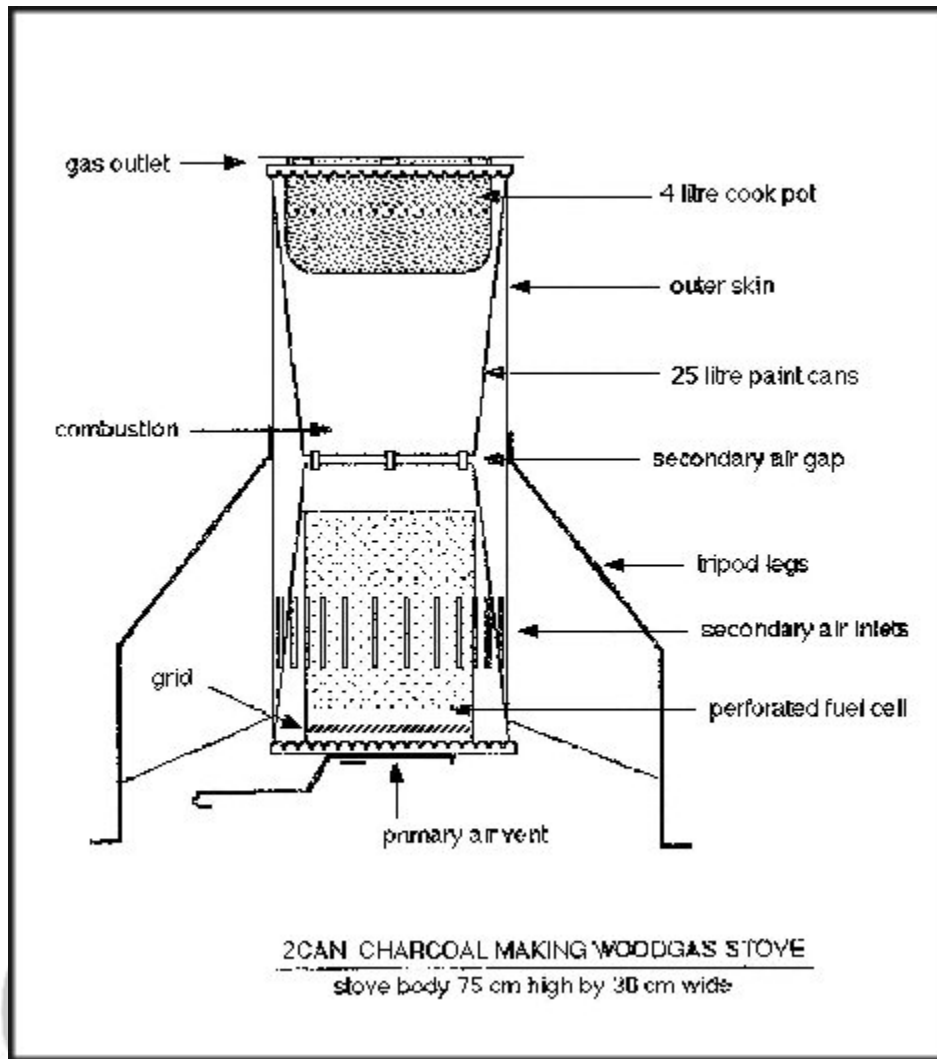
- Lump charcoal is bulkier, has odd shapes, and crushes more easily.
- It tends to become dusty and flakes-off.
- Consumer demand is limited. (Applies only from a business aspect.)
- Current price is nearly twice that of briquettes. (Applies only from a business aspect.)



Anyway, a while back a neighbor and I decided we wanted to try and make our own lump charcoal. So we dug up some instructions and went about collecting some hardwood (hickory, oak, maple, and fruitwoods are favored) and scrounging up a couple metal barrels. We used some of our spare bricks (from my neighbor's rebuild of his fireplace) and set to work.



About the time we were burning the wood the smoke and smell was all over the block so a couple of neighbors came by and asked if they should call the fire department. We explained what we were trying to do and as time passed more neighbors joined in.



By the time we were done we had our first batch and decided to test it out against good ol' Kingsford. So out came two grills and some burgers and brauts as well as the rest of the neighbors. By a decision of 5 to 2 (one didn't notice any difference) the homemade lump charcoal beat Kingsford for our taste and heating criteria.



Since my neighbor and I didn't know what we were doing this time around and didn't want any "blackmail" shots of us floating about – we did not take any photos of our "experiment". We have tried this a few more times since then and haven't blown anything or anyone up yet; so once we get the contraption looking like it isn't a pile of junk we will be taking some instructional photos. Until then here are the sites we used for our experiments – so have at it and enjoy: These two were combined for our first try at it:

<http://www.twinoaksforge.com/BLADSMITHING/MAKING%20CHARCOAL.htm> &

<http://www.nakedwhiz.com/makinglump.htm>

Then came some modifications from these two sites: <http://www.velvitoil.com/Charmake.htm> &

<http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-some-Charcoal/>

Some great simple and precise diagrams and instructions can be found at:

<http://www.eaglequest.com/~bbq/charcoal/index.html>

These two sites kinda repeat our previous attempts: <http://www.livingoffgrid.org/how-to-make-your-own-charcoal-at-home/> & <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/how-to-make-charcoal-briquettes.html>

This one is for a single barrel kiln: <http://terrapreta.bioenergylists.org/makingcharcoal>

We want to try this one next as it says you can burn leaf "litter" in this and add the "charcoal ash" to your compost.



Single Barrel Charcoal Kiln using urban leaf litter



Single Barrel Charcoal Kiln

For some great information on different woods (remember that lye is made from wood ash) can be found at:

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/different-types-of-wood.html>

"A person that has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."

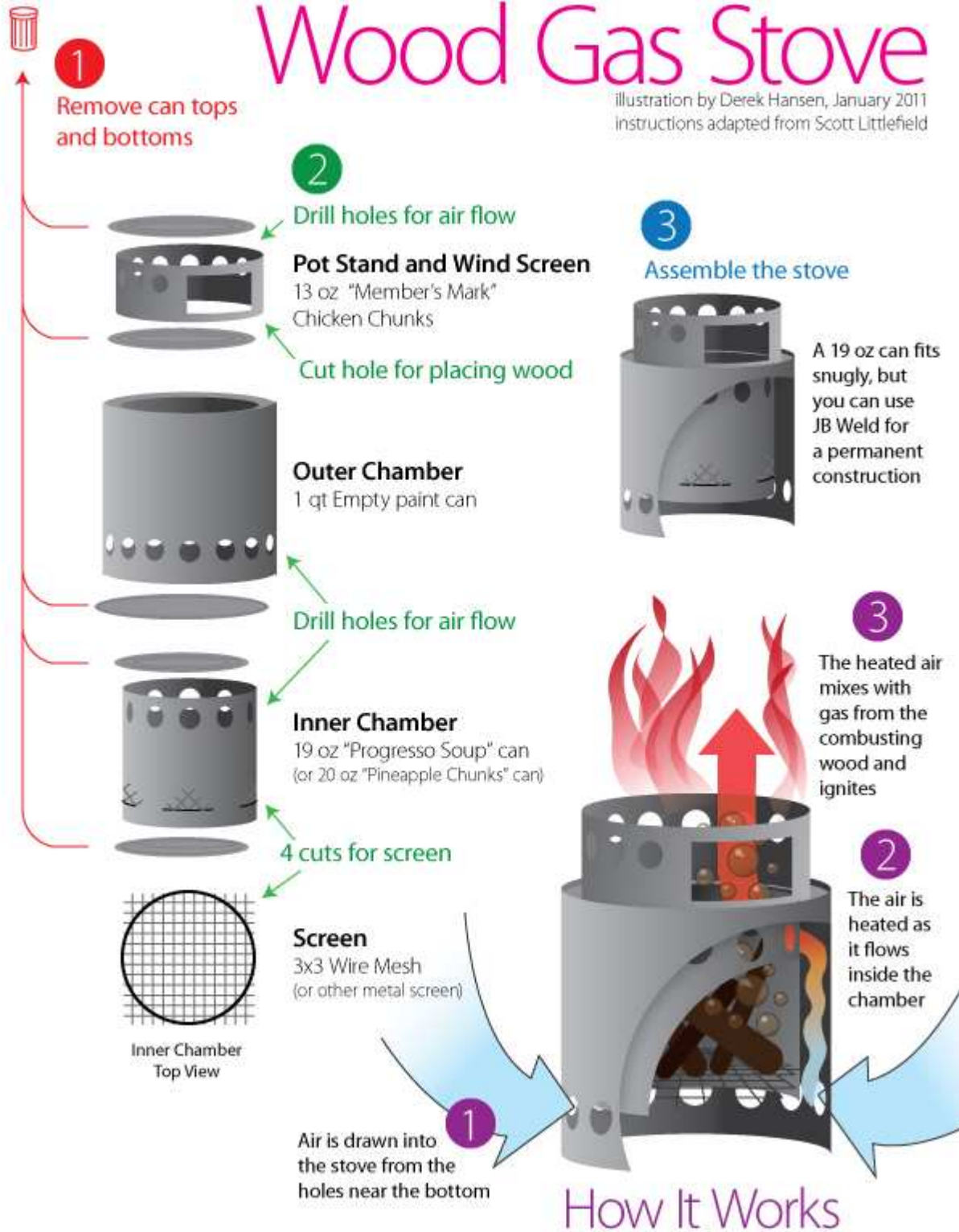
Albert Einstein

TNT

A 50 Something, soon homesteading, Prepper ;-}

Wood Gas Stove

illustration by Derek Hansen, January 2011
instructions adapted from Scott Littlefield



Gear-report.com