

## Fire Techniques



**Portable Fire Pans:** Fire pans are metal trays with sides high enough to contain wood and ashes (about three inches). Metal oil drain pans and backyard barbecue grills make effective and inexpensive fire pans. A few outdoor companies are beginning to market lightweight versions. The pan should be lined with several inches of mineral soil (soils that contain little or no decomposing organic material), or propped up on small rocks to protect the surface underneath from the heat.

**Mound Fires:** A platform or mound of mineral soil can be built as a fire pad and later easily disguised. First, locate a naturally occurring source of mineral soil, sand, and or gravel such as the hole left by a tree's roots when it blows over, or large stream courses where sand or fine gravel has been deposited in non-vegetated areas along the banks. Use pots or a stuff sack to carry the dirt to the fire site. Build a circular, flat-topped fire platform, six to eight inches thick and about two feet across, with the mineral soil. A tarp or ground cloth lain down beneath the soil will facilitate clean up.



The thickness of the mound is critical for insulating the tarp and ground underneath from the heat of the fire. Once the fire is out and cold, the leftover ashes can be scattered and the mineral soil returned to its source, which is then "brushed up" to eliminate signs that it was disturbed.

The advantage of this type of fire is that it can be built on durable surfaces, such as flat exposed rock or ledge, leaf litter, pine needles, or even short grass without damage to the surface or soil. However, it is less desirable than a fire pan, because the mineral soil must be moved, and sources of such soil are sometimes difficult to locate.

**Pit Fires:** In the past, fire pits dug out of sod were a recommended low-impact technique. However, even after carefully watering and replacing the sod, these sites subside over time, leaving a noticeable scar. Instead of this method, use fire pan or mound techniques. If done properly, these leave much less of an impact on the surface.

**Please remember when you are in Cloud Peak Wilderness,  
campfires are prohibited above 9,200 ft**