

How *Not* to Coal-Burn a Wooden Container by storm

Usually I tend to charge ahead with projects, abandoning fore-thought, not really planning the route by which I will reach the finished tool, artwork, or even written article. Although I always learn something, sometimes I really end up with nothing useable. Take coal-burning, for example. In my haste to play with fire, I neglected to thoroughly research the subject. So I hope you learn from my mistakes. I hope I have learned from my mistakes...

Ah, fire...a good place to begin. One of mankind's oldest and most versatile tools. In order to coal-burn yourself a container, you need coals. What better place to build coals than right where you need them. Make sure you start out with a dry block of wood. Wet or unseasoned wooden blanks will shrink and crack more.



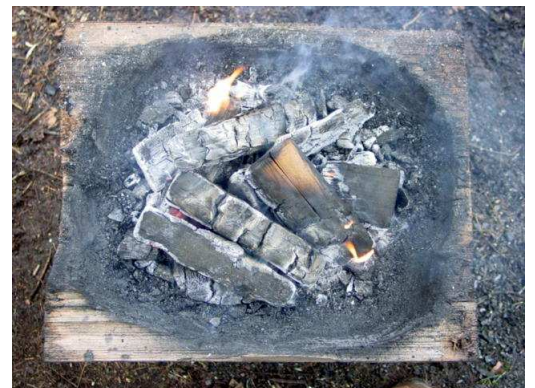
I didn't do it!

Since I'm using Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar to stoke the fire (softwoods), a lot of wood is needed to get those coals formed...



Now that the fire's died down, you can see the bowl taking shape.

But wait...the fire burned awfully close to the edge. Gotta take care of that.



Putting some wet sand on the surfaces where you don't want the fire to burn will prevent accidental removal of wood.



After the fire is pushed aside, you can now use an edged or pointed implement to chisel out the charred wood.



So far this container can hold three quarts of water. Looking good! (except for that hunk of wood on the right-hand edge that my hatchet knocked off...)



Well, I made a pretty nice depression in this chunk of Western Red Cedar! Apparently, the higher heat and speedier drying caused by a larger-than-necessary fire created this crack. But at least it holds a liter of water (in the bottle)!

[It wasn't a total loss, though. I used the fire to reduce and shape a stone-blade knife handle.]



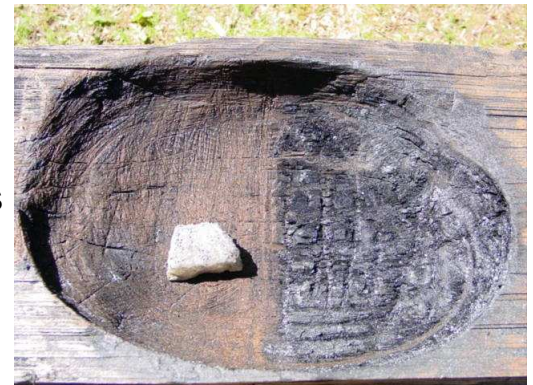
Oh, baby! That Grand Canyon of a crack would let Niagara Falls through if I tried to boil anything in this waste-of-effort!



Apparently it takes more than once to learn the lesson today.



That's better. Three time's the charm! I'm using a small bed of quartz crystals to scrape the char off the bowl so that I can monitor the fire's progress. After this scraping is finished, I'll put more coals in the depression.



A close-up view of the quartz scraper.



A hollow stick (such as a large grass stem--Rivercane, Bamboo—or Elderberry stem) can provide you with more control over the direction and speed which the fire burns.



Applying water to control the burn...



A slower, more controlled burn will result in a useful product.



A beautiful finished product—it holds a gallon. I used horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*) and then a coating of olive oil in the final polish.



A good day's work.



Now to stone-boil some Red Alder seedlings for supper!



But wait! Some rocks crack under such rapid cooling. Which rocks perform better and which should I avoid? Luckily, my next article explores this very topic...

