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Identifying And Using Fatwood In The Bush (VERY Picture Heavy)

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Fire Methods of starting fire, acquiring tinder, best wood to use, etc. An essential skill in bushcraft.

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12-09-2009, 05:37 PM

#1



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Identifying And Using Fatwood In The Bush (VERY Picture Heavy)

Fatwood is a natural accelerant that can be used to start fires under virtually any conditions anyone might wish to build a fire. It is formed when a Pine tree dies while standing and the pitch settles and collects in heavy concentrations in the lower sections of the tree. In the largest trees it can form in the heart and limbs several feet about the stump and root section and in the smaller trees it will be closer to the ground. It will also form in areas of the tree that have been injured where a heavy concentration of pitch built up while the tree was still living. In any case the **fatwood** in the lower stump and root sections will usually be much more rich than the sections higher up. From my research **Fatwood** can be found in any area where Pine trees grow, I have personally found it through out the South East U.S., and have friends who have found it in the Northern regions, in the U.K., in the Philippines, and in places like Honduras (whose lumber industry appears to be the leading supplier of commercial **fatwood**). From what I have seen it will form in vurtually any pine tree white or yellow. However it does not appear to form in all conifer trees. I have never found it in what I knew to be a Cedar or Hemlock tree.

Fatwood can be found in the woods in different states of being. Some times you will find it in rotten looking stumps like this. At first glance this just looks like rotten wood unfit even for a camp fire.





But if it is **fatwood**, when you break into it you'll see a much more solid interior than you expect and you'll smell a strong scent of turpentine.





Other times you can find whole trees that are mostly **fatwood**.



In this particular case the outer layer is very "punky" to a depth of approximately three inches but very solid past that. Eventually the outer layer will weather away leaving a large **Fatwood** skeleton.





It can be found as what appears to be a weathered, rotten looking piece of wood protruding from or just laying on the ground. In this state of being the wear pattern in the grain will be your best clue







At times you will find it in what appears to be just a rotten pile of wood where a tree used to be.





It can also be found in what a lot of folks refer to as Pine Knots. These are concentrations of pitch that have formed at

the bases of limbs.





How the tree dies, and what time of year likely have a good bit to do with how it forms. Regardless of what state you find it in, whether you find it on top of the ground or under it, whether it has been dry in the area for weeks or raining for

days it will still exhibit the same characteristics. It is a pitch heavy wood that will not absorb water that will take a spark easily, and flame even more easily, and a fire made up of only split pieces of **fatwood** will even burn in the lighter rains once it is going good.

It is a hard dense material that is best processed from stump form with an axe or a heavy knife.







It will ignite with either flames or by spark when whittled into the traditional "fuzzsticks"







but one of my favorite ways to work with it to get a fire quickly when using a firesteel is to use the spine of my knife to

scrape the surface of the **fatwood** into a thick, gooey type of fuzz. This fuzz takes a spark very well and burns very hot to ignite other heavier slivers of **fatwood** quickly to get a fire going fast even under very damp conditions.





the following pictures more completely illustrates this process from start to finish.

Place the spine of the knife against the **fatwood** like this and repeatedly scrape until you have the desired amount of fuzz.



This is what will be going on on the other side of the knife.



When working with smaller pieces as above I usually just leave the fuzz attached to the piece and ignite it. When working with larger pieces of **fatwood** you can whittle off the fuzzed up part and place it where ever you intend to start the fire.



Just place the end of the firesteel directly into the fuzz pile and scrape.



add your fuel and soon you have fire. This was done after two days of rains and flooding.



Last edited by [Outrider](#); 12-09-2009 at 06:20 PM. Reason: To add a picture I left out

[Edit](#) [Quote](#) [??](#) [??](#) [Thanks](#)

The Following 52 Users Say Thank You to Outrider For This Useful Post:

[1Jesster](#), [Adam B](#), [Andy](#), [bundlestitch](#), [bmatt](#), [BOD](#), [BushBum](#), [carnivor way](#), [Chazz Hiben](#), [Cracker](#), [Creek Walker](#), [dabigpig](#), [daveridesbikes](#), [d_filgate](#), [Eagle](#), [Ed Read](#), [Eddie](#), [Egret](#), [grey wolf](#), [helix](#), [jungleman](#), [Koa](#), [Lead Dog](#), [LetsRock](#), [mahaney](#), [Martes Pennanti](#), [matt](#), [Matthew D G](#), [mongo1958](#), [moose](#), [MountainWoman](#), [Old Hickory](#), [Particlem](#), [Pawoodsman](#), [randyt](#), [Ripmyfly](#), [sarge1967](#), [SkogKniv](#), [skwoodsman](#), [snakedoctor](#), [sotramk](#), [swamprat](#), [TeeDee](#), [tennededar](#), [TennesseanKid](#), [tnrick55](#), [Trekon86](#), [Valcas1](#), [wandering owl](#), [wolfy](#), [Yankee Cymro](#), [YJake](#)

12-09-2009, 05:45 PM

#2



[snakedoctor](#)
Guide

Join Date: Jul 2009
Location: hell! conover nc
Posts: 2,477
Thanks: 5,003
Thanked 1,802 Times in 947 Posts

Thank you for this! Because I had no idea what or where to find the elusive "**fatwood**"!

happiness is a choice
<http://snakedoctor828.wordpress.com/>
Im a simple hot sauce on plain potato chips kind of guy

[Edit](#) [Quote](#) [??](#) [??](#) [Thanks](#)

12-09-2009, 06:02 PM

#3



[Chazz Hiben](#)
Scout

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: Downing, WI
Posts: 354
Thanks: 426
Thanked 99 Times in 80 Posts



Thanks for the info good work
Bushcraft is not a hobby, its a lifestyle...

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:12 PM

#4 [Warning Icon] [Printer Icon]



Sgt. Mac
STAFF

Join Date: Dec 2008
Location: Illinois
Posts: 4,848
Thanks: 7,155
Thanked 3,295 Times in 1,706 Posts



Nice post

I've done so much with so little for so long, I can do anything with nothing.

"Chance favors the prepared mind"

Sic Semper Tyrannis

Luke 5:16

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:13 PM

#5 [Warning Icon] [Printer Icon]



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts



Glad you enjoyed the post guys. And to show you how easy it is to use here is a short video from my wife's first firesteel and **fatwood** lesson. I taught her to do fuzz sticks first for practice with "non-fatwood"

YouTube - Lisa's first firesteel success

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:24 PM

#6 [Warning Icon] [Printer Icon]



snakedoctor
Guide

Join Date: Jul 2009
Location: hell! conover nc
Posts: 2,477
Thanks: 5,003
Thanked 1,802 Times in 947 Posts



Can we make this a sticky for the other fat wood illiterate!

KEPIS!!!!!!

happiness is a choice

<http://snakedoctor828.wordpress.com/>

Im a simple hot sauce on plain potato chips kind of guy

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:34 PM

#7

[randyt](#)

Scout

Join Date: May 2009
Posts: 793
Thanks: 247
Thanked 510 Times in 258 Posts



very nice info. you covered a lot of good material.

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:39 PM

#8



[SkogKniv](#)
Moderator/STAFF

Join Date: Dec 2008
Location: Way Upstate NY
Posts: 2,224
Thanks: 3,157
Thanked 1,888 Times in 842 Posts



Excellent post!

YouTube page: <http://www.youtube.com/user/SkogKniv>

Ebay page: <http://shop.ebay.com/merchant/skogkniv>

"The great thing about bushcraft is that wherever you go, the skills go with you." -R.M.

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 06:46 PM

#9



[Ripmyfly](#)
Moderator/Staff

Join Date: Sep 2008
Location: Southeast Tennessee
Posts: 2,807
Thanks: 1,056
Thanked 1,020 Times in 619 Posts



The best **fatwood** harvesting tutorial I ever saw. Thank you! I made it a sticky.

III John 1:4

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

The Following 2 Users Say Thank You to Ripmyfly For This Useful Post:

[d_filgate](#), [snakedoctor](#)

12-09-2009, 06:59 PM

#10



[TeeDee](#)
Tracker

Join Date: Sep 2009
Location: Brit-ain
Posts: 237
Thanks: 123
Thanked 128 Times in 78 Posts



Thanks for posting this up Outrider.

A very, very worthwhile post and required reading for all Buchcrafty outdoorsy people.

Nice job.

Don't get to cocky. Mother Nature will bitch slap you right in the face.

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 07:53 PM

#11



Trekon86
Staff/Moderator

Join Date: Oct 2008
Posts: 7,869
Thanks: 4,756
Thanked 2,653 Times in 1,789 Posts



Excellent! 😊

I will have to go find some...I know what types of snags you're talking about...and luckily I know the exact location of a large punky tree trunk 😊

PMZ

BB

"An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."
~Sir Winston Churchill~

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 08:10 PM

#12



Avair
convex fan

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: NB Canada
Posts: 331
Thanks: 129
Thanked 253 Times in 113 Posts



Very cool post, I am on the serch this weekend. Thanks

You are only as safe and happy as your skill level allows.

You can't be lost if you don't care where you are!

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 08:21 PM

#13



Tacticalgearhead
Scout

Join Date: Aug 2009
Location: Central IL, USA
Posts: 721
Thanks: 171
Thanked 317 Times in 185 Posts



Man that was useful! Thanks so much for the pics, they were really useful.

<http://tacticalgearhead.com>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/Tacticalgearhead>
<http://twitter.com/tacticalgearhd>

"The great thing about bushcraft is that wherever you go, the skills go with you." - Ray Mears

"Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee..." - Job 12:8

"You do realize that you spend more time on that bushcraft forum than you do actually being outdoors, right?" - My wise wife

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

12-09-2009, 08:25 PM

#14



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts



Thanks everyone, I'm really glad you enjoyed the post. **Fatwood** is a very useful tinder and fuel that is good for quickly lighting fires for what ever reason...heat, cooking, or signaling, just remember not to cook over it unless maybe in a covered pot if you have no other choice. I haven't personally tried to apply it to flint and steel or friction fire methods as I've only recently began to study either. However I know how well it woks with flames and with sparks from a ferro rod and I have used **fatwood**, some fine steel wool and a cell phone battery to start a fire. It only takes a small amount to get a fire going good under really wet conditions It's a handy material to be aware of.

Edit Quote Reply Share Thanks

The Following User Says Thank You to Outrider For This Useful Post:

Andy2112

12-10-2009, 05:08 AM



#15    



[Andy2112](#) 
Scout

Join Date: Aug 2009
Location: Central UK
Posts: 431
Thanks: 56
Thanked 119 Times in 77 Posts



After reading Outrider's post on another forum i knew what to look for, so a while ago while out on a walk with my wife and son we came through a small pine plantation when returning back to the car. I saw a smallish stump sticking out where it had been felled so as i was wearing my normal bushcrafty boots i gave it a sharp boot and out it pops. Got it home and a few days later i started preping it, lo and behold, **fatwood** . So, thanks very much Brian for sharing such a great piece of knowledge with us, you never know when you may need to id and use **fatwood** while out and about. 

Keeping to the Spirit of the Campfire.

 Edit  Quote    Thanks

12-10-2009, 05:30 AM

#16    

[pedro](#) 
Tinder Gatherer

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 82
Thanks: 10
Thanked 41 Times in 30 Posts



Excellent post! Well done, keep it up!

 Edit  Quote    Thanks

12-10-2009, 08:17 AM

#17    



[skwoodsman](#) 
Scout

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: Slovakia
Posts: 302
Thanks: 479
Thanked 290 Times in 112 Posts



Great post mate! I have one question. What type of pine is best for finding **fatwood**? Because not every pine is resinous enough to make good portion of **fatwood**.

I have only pinus sylvestris - scotch pine in my environment. And every trunk i found was completely rotten. I found **fatwood** only in dead limbs where they are attached to the trunk (Ligher knot).



As you can see on this picture, the **fatwood** is only on one end of the stick, the other end is dead wood. And that is very small amount of **fatwood** 😞



So do you have any experience with scotch pine?
Thanks
Matt

Last edited by skwoodsman; 12-10-2009 at 09:45 AM.

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-10-2009, 01:40 PM

#18



campcrafter
Scout

Join Date: Oct 2009
Location: SW Missouri
Posts: 360
Thanks: 345
Thanked 285 Times in 142 Posts



Thanks - very educating - well done with the pics.

cc

...it seems to me that Woodcraft, in its broad entirety, more than any other activity, is calculated to save our species from decay. - Ernest Thompson Seton

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-10-2009, 02:31 PM

#19



gloomhound
Scout

Join Date: Nov 2008
Location: WV
Posts: 268
Thanks: 82
Thanked 139 Times in 97 Posts



This reminds me of my Dad. He had a thing for **fatwood** or as the old folks around here called it tarwood. We would cut wood when I was a kid and he never could pass up a chance to knock over any old pine stump with a sledge. I seem to recall that he thought Tamarack was the best.

Edit Quote Reply Thanks

12-10-2009, 02:39 PM

#20



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **skwoodsman**

Great post mate! I have one question. What type of pine is best for finding **fatwood**? Because not every pine is resinous enough to make good portion of **fatwood**.

I have only pinus sylvestris - scotch pine in my environment. And every trunk i found was completely rotten. I found **fatwood** only in dead limbs where they are attached to the trunk (Ligher knot).

As you can see on this picture, the **fatwood** is only on one end of the stick, the other end is dead wood. And that is very small amount of **fatwood**



So do you have any experience with scotch pine?
Thanks
Matt

Honestly I am not enough of an arborist to say what some of the pine trees I've found it in were for sure. I can say that most of what I find is in yellow pine, but I do find it in white pines too. The white is usually a little different...it's less dense and lighter but sparkles and glistens in the sunlight and burns very well



12-10-2009, 02:40 PM

#21



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Andy2112**

After reading Outrider's post on another forum i knew what to look for, so a while ago while out on a walk with my wife and son we came through a small pine plantation when returning back to the car. I saw a smallish stump sticking

out where it had been felled so as i was wearing my normal bushcrafty boots i gave it a sharp boot and out it pops. Got it home and a few days later i started preping it, lo and behold, **fatwood** 😊. So, thanks very much Brian for sharing such a great piece of knowledge with us, you never know when you may need to id and use **fatwood** while out and about. 🌲

Thanks for that Andy, glad I was able to teach you a useful bit of info.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **pedro** 📄
Excellent post! Well done, keep it up!

Thanks Pedro, glad you enjoyed it.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **skwoodsman** 📄
Great post mate! I have one question. What type of pine is best for finding **fatwood**? Because not every pine is resinous enough to make good portion of **fatwood**.

I have only pinus sylvestris - scotch pine in my environment. And every trunk i found was completely rotten. I found **fatwood** only in dead limbs where they are attached to the trunk (Ligher knot).

As you can see on this picture, the **fatwood** is only on one end of the stick, the other end is dead wood. And that is very small amount of **fatwood** 😞



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Thanks
Matt

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What you did find however is well worth knowing about and plenty to start a fire.

Buttons for Edit, Quote, Reply, and Thanks.

12-10-2009, 09:33 PM



bindlestitch
Mod/Staff Super chump

Join Date: May 2009
Location: Missouri
Posts: 3,144
Thanks: 5,048
Thanked 2,460 Times in 1,294 Posts



Good stuff, man.
We don't have any around here. ☹️
Iz

Romans 10:9
[Turley Custom Knives](#)
[Remeber the birds youtube channel](#)

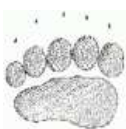
"Where I come from we don't trust a man who leaves the house without a knife, a compass and some beef jerky."
Constable Benton Fraser , RCMP

"See the High Priest He took my place, when the Judge looks at me He sees His Son's face." -16 Horsepower



12-10-2009, 09:49 PM

#23



abo4ster
Tracker

Join Date: Jun 2009
Location: North Georgia
Posts: 169
Thanks: 68
Thanked 208 Times in 83 Posts

Great post Outrider.

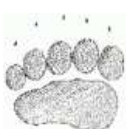
Those trees you are finding **fatwood** the length of the stem is Virginia Pine (in the southeast). When the outer rot of sap wood is gone (or removed), it can be identified by the distinct lines running along the branch perpindicular. Anytime I am in a forest type with Virgina Pine I am on the outlook for its dead brothers.

Flint Knapping ~ so easy a caveman could do it!



12-10-2009, 09:56 PM

#24



abo4ster
Tracker

Join Date: Jun 2009
Location: North Georgia
Posts: 169
Thanks: 68
Thanked 208 Times in 83 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Outrider**

Honestly I am not enough of an arborist to say what some of the pine trees I've found it in were for sure. I can say that most of what I find is in yellow pine, but I do find it in white pines too. The white is usually a little different...it's less dense and lighter but sparkles and glistens in the sunlight and burns very well.

What you did find however is well worth knowing about and plenty to start a fire.

Ahhh!!! Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) the other fire friendly pine. While not a **fatwood** producer like other yellow pines, white pine makes a great bow drill. White pine also retains its dead branches making it a great resource in wet weather. In addition, its twigs can be very fine making it an excellent kindling to take a match.

In wet weather, I am looking for a live virgina pine as **fatwood** should be close by and white pine for fuel wood.

By the way, tagging on to my other post, an easy way to identify Virigina Pine is trying to pull off a branch, even those that have been dead for sometime. Very difficult.

Flint Knapping ~ so easy a caveman could do it!



12-10-2009, 09:56 PM

#25



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **bindlestitch**
Good stuff, man.
We don't have any around here.
Iz

Thanks, glad you enjoyed it anyway.

Just out of curiosity...what area are you in?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **abo4ster**
Great post Outrider.

*Those trees you are finding **fatwood** the length of the stem is Virginia Pine (in the southeast). When the outer rot of sap wood is gone (or removed), it can be identified by the distinct lines running along the branch perpendicular. Anytime I am in a forest type with Virginia Pine I am on the outlook for its dead brothers.*

Thanks, I'm glad you enjoyed the post and thanks for the info. I'll have to remember that and learn to identify those for sure.



The Following User Says Thank You to Outrider For This Useful Post:

[bindlestitch](#)

12-10-2009, 09:59 PM

#26



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **abo4ster**

By the way, tagging on to my other post, an easy way to identify Virginia Pine is trying to pull off a branch, even those that have been dead for sometime. Very difficult.

I have encountered that a good bit, like a fallen tree I found a while back.

Anything that gives them away while alive?



12-10-2009, 10:03 PM

#27



bindlestitch
Mod/Staff Super chump

Join Date: May 2009
Location: Missouri
Posts: 3,144
Thanks: 5,048
Thanked 2,460 Times in 1,294 Posts



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Outrider**
Thanks, glad you enjoyed it anyway.

Just out of curiosity...what area are you in?

Central Missouri. We only have native pines in the southern part of the state.

Iz

Romans 10:9
[Turley Custom Knives](#)
[Remeber the birds youtube channel](#)

"Where I come from we don't trust a man who leaves the house without a knife, a compass and some beef jerky."
Constable Benton Fraser , RCMP

"See the High Priest He took my place, when the Judge looks at me He sees His Son's face." -16 Horsepower



12-10-2009, 10:25 PM

#28



Mountain Ron
Guide

Join Date: Nov 2008
Location: Central Valley of California
Posts: 1,412
Thanks: 1,229
Thanked 1,380 Times in 621 Posts

Great post, Outrider! Enjoyed the tut and I think ya did good. 😊

<http://ronspimitiveskills.blogspot.com/>

CLARIOR HINC HONOS

De Opresso Libre

Deu 33:15 And the chief things of the oldest mountains, and the good things of the eternal hills,



12-10-2009, 11:41 PM

#29



Outrider
Tracker

Join Date: Nov 2009
Location: South East Tennessee
Posts: 177
Thanks: 33
Thanked 251 Times in 44 Posts

Quote:

Originally Posted by **bindlestitch**
*Central Missouri. We only have native pines in the southern part of the state.
Iz*

Hmmm, so do you have Birch trees in your immediate area?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Mountain Ron**
Great post, Outrider! Enjoyed the tut and I think ya did good. 😊

Thanks MR, glad you enjoyed the post.



12-11-2009, 12:42 PM

#30



bindlestitch
Mod/Staff Super chump

Join Date: May 2009
Location: Missouri
Posts: 3,144
Thanks: 5,048
Thanked 2,460 Times in 1,294 Posts



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Outrider**
Hmmm, so do you have Birch trees in your immediate area?

No, not many birches either. We're in hardwood forests. Whole different ballgame but there's still plenty of great tinders

available.
Iz

Romans 10:9
[Turley Custom Knives](#)
[Remeber the birds youtube channel](#)

"Where I come from we don't trust a man who leaves the house without a knife, a compass and some beef jerky."
Constable Benton Fraser , RCMP

"See the High Priest He took my place, when the Judge looks at me He sees His Son's face." -16 Horsepower

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