

Cow Dung as Fuel

8/5/13 Ken Lent

Some poverty stricken nations have used animal dung as fuel in fire making for many generations. Let's hope it never comes to this in America. But in case an unusual individual situation arises for the lone expeditioner, or (God forbid) America sinks a *whole lot* lower than expected before a national awakening occurs, here's how to make fuel sticks from cow dung. (They'll actually be more like rough "fuel chunks")

This type of incendiary material does not burn like wood in large flames of a roaring fire. This is more of a semi charcoal smoldering supplement to a fire in order to better ration a scarce supply of wood for an outdoor fire. After ignited for a while cow dung "fuel sticks" add to the coal base of heat in a fire instead of assisting in feeding the fire into massive flames. Therefore, the affect is somewhat moderate if we're gauging heat intensity of a campfire or an "on the move" survival fire for cooking, boiling, or other. But it *does* work since the addition of dung fuel to a fire will definitely save on wood, and substitutes for a lack thereof. In this instruction we'll cover the basics of converting cow dung into fuel. The enthusiastic survivalist reading this is invited to experiment with other animal dung if they feel so inclined.

Instructions:



First of all we want to locate a cow pasture and/or trails in and around it. On a trail near a field pasture I've located a pile of dung -- seen below my machete. The tree bark was peeled off from a log and will be used to transport this potential "fuel stick" to be.



Here's a close up. This goopy droppings appears to be about 3 or 4 days old. There's no need to be picky in a dire situation, so obtain what you can whether older or newer in its appearance.



After only a ten minute search we have hit the jackpot. The trail is heavily traveled by a herd and there are now 5 dung droppings collected and placed on the tree bark. Next we need to find some very dry grass (dry leaves would suffice too) that are going to be used in making our fuel.



There is no dung shown in this picture above. Here the dried grass is placed on a log top and cut into smaller pieces for mixing with the dung. Shown below the knife is the “before” grass strands, and above to the right (arrow) is the “after” chopped grass.



Now we place the chopped grass on the bark with the dung (near equal amounts) and add water to make a mush in consistency. If you find yourself in a serious “Rambo” scenario and can’t waste any water, just urinate on the pile. At this point, it isn’t going hurt anything. The reason we are adding grass to the dung is because lit dried dung will only smolder and smoke with some lower/moderate heat. We need to boost the BTU heat production by “tweaking” it with inner dried grass to help it burn a little better.



Mix the combo until it is uniformly worked into a kneaded consistency.



Aha – the preparation of having latex gloves handy comes to mind. If you don't have that luxury you will need to go bare handed as it's the fastest and easiest way to form the mess into the "fuel sticks". This is no time to have a weak stomach. If this situation has arisen, you're probably in crucial survival mode. You can make them any shape you want, just keep them not more than a half inch thick or the drying time will be increased. Needless to say, be diligent in getting those hands cleaned off – and then some! Don't do this with an open wound on your hand. [I wonder how many are now going to stuff some latex gloves in their back-pack side pocket pouches? ☺ --- good idea for other uses too.]



Above are 8 “fuel patties” laid on rocks to sun dry them. It took two whole hot days of drying, 85 degrees, late July clear Sun in Virginia. In Arizona it will be quicker, in Maine it will most likely take longer. They need to be *bone dry* all the way through before using. Reasonably, it would be good to make several dozens at a time while you have the “production line” going. Cow dung fuel has very little odor when dried and not a fecal smell at all. There is also no fecal odor to the smoke in case anyone thought of it.



This is a small fire of only a foot in diameter. After lighting a few small twigs the dung fuel (at arrows) is placed on top and has ignited. There is little flame and the dung fuel burns as coals somewhat like charcoal. Burn time is about 30 minutes, enough to boil water and cook a decent lunch. 3 “hamburger size” dung fuel patties broken in pieces were used in making this fire. Larger patties or blocks would result in more coals and much longer burn time. The size shown here is good for back-packers on the move.