

HOW TO LIGHT YOUR SMOKER AND USING DIFFERENT SMOKER FUELS

Always light your smoker before putting on your veil, and gloves (especially latex or rubber gloves), you don't want gloves melted onto your hands or a hole melted in your veil!

Bigger smokers are easier to keep alight than smaller ones, because you get a larger fire going in the chamber, and they burn longer. They are easier to clean out (you can get your hand down inside when it's cool!).

You can use any fuel you like, cardboard, egg boxes, sacking, rotten timber, grass nuts or straw pellets, cotton waste, fir cones, hay etc... Just test some of your chosen media to see it burns before you start! I had a colleague who converted all the packaging from a sofa into rolls to fit his smoker, had a whole seasons fuel... only to find it was laced with fire retardant and would not burn!

Cotton waste is popular with novices doing their Basic Assessment where you have to demonstrate you can light and keep a smoker going. You have to fluff up the waste to get it to light. Once lit drop it lit end down into the smoker, it will burn well and last the duration of your assessment.

Keep your fuel somewhere dry, shed, greenhouse, conservatory the latter two are good for drying out foraged fuel. Once it is dry you don't want it attracting the damp, I keep some dry fuel and lighter in an airtight bucket.

You have to light the smoker from the bottom up. Too many people try to light the material in the top of the smoker. The air from the bellows comes into the chamber from the bottom, passing up through the fuel. By attempting to light the material on the top you are blowing the fire AWAY from the fuel.

The trick is to empty out your smoker, light a small amount of card/paper (you can use a fire stick lighter) and drop it into the bottom, on the hearth. Add dry fuel (it can be previously partially burnt material, nothing like re-cycling). Operate the bellows - this blows the fire/flame towards the fuel.

Spend a couple of minutes pumping the bellows and occasionally shaking the chamber to get the material to settle down. Once the smoker is lit and settled, top up with fresh fuel. If you use small pellet like material (as I do) you may want to put a piece of mesh on top of the fuel to stop lit pellets from being blown out of the smoker chimney. Everything in the hive will burn! You do not want flames or burning matter issuing from the chimney. The smoke should be cool and be a pleasant smell (you are trying to mimic wood smoke).

If the smoke is acrid or eye watering you probably need to change the material you are burning.

Once lit the smoker should stay lit for hours with minimal attention. Some fuel like hay will burn more quickly than say timber or pellets. Try a range of fuel and find what works for you and your bees. If your smoker is burning too quickly, and generating too much smoke, kick it onto its side... this will reduce the air flow and calm down the fire. You can always right it to fire it up again.

To put the smoker out you need to starve the fire of oxygen. Put a plug of green grass into the chimney, this should be enough to choke out the fire. Just for safety I carry my lit smoker from apiary to apiary in a small galvanised dustbin, yes I have nearly set light to my car in the past, and the smell of the smoke took forever to get rid of!



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