

Making Charcloth

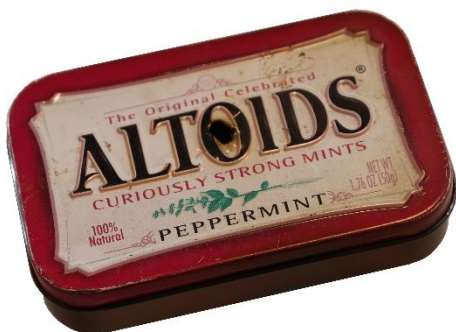
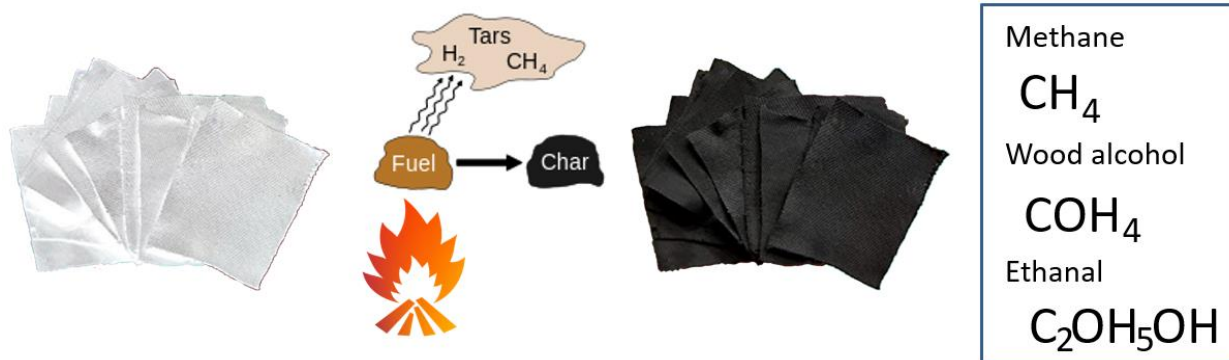
By Steven Dykeman

Be safe
Have fun
Better yourself



Char cloth is a piece of fabric (typically cotton) that has been converted into a slow-burning fuel of very low ignition temperature. It is capable of being ignited by a spark or from magnified sunlight. It can then be used to ignite a tinder bundle to start a fire.

Char cloth is made by putting cloth into an almost airtight tin with a small hole in it, and heating it on campfire coals until the smoking slows and the cloth is properly charred.



Many beginners use a readily available tin to produce a small batch of char cloth. An Altoids can is commonly used. Since cloth will be placed inside and heated, a tin can is ideal. An aluminum can may melt or become brittle and crack. Most containers are plastic nowadays which would be totally out of the question. A small hole is punched in the top of the can to let gasses and tars escape.

Knit cotton works well, and often an old tee-shirt is cut into squares and placed inside the tin. What many people discover, is that the cut tee-shirt pieces tend to role up making them difficult to place flat. One way around this is to just accept it and cut long strips and role them up into small roles. The picture to the left shows knit cotton squares placed inside the tin. The picture below shows an example of completed charcloth that had been rolled from strips of a cut tee-shirt.



If you use an old tee-shirt, it does not need to be white. What typically happens is the color fades as it heats and the cloth will turn brown before it turns black.

A kit is available for making your own charcloth. A small size paint can and 100 round knit cotton cloths along with instructions are provided as a way to make all the charcloth you could ever need.



[Click here for information on the charcloth making kit](#)

After placing cloth pieces in the tin can, hammer the lid tight. It is ideal to heat the cotton pieces evenly at a controlled temperature, however this would require complex apparatus. Satisfactory results can be achieved by placing the can over a stove flame or on hot coals. At first a lot of smoke will exit the hole in the can's lid. This smoke consists of water vapor, volatile gasses, and tars. Since these gasses quickly cool

upon exiting the can, they do not ignite and produce a flame. If you light the smoke with a match, the volatile vapors will ignite and a flame will result. If you choose to light the gasses, this will not interfere with the charring process. These are two separate reactions taking place; one inside the can, and one outside the can.



A large amount of smoke at first



Gasses are volatile



Gasses reduce when near completion

After most of the gasses are released from the cotton cloth, the smoke will reduce. When the smoke has stopped, the charring process is complete. When you feel the process is complete, let the can cool. The

can must be cool before opening. You do not want to burn yourself, but also, opening the can while it is hot will allow oxygen into the can and cause combustion.

After opening, examine your charcloth. Completed charcloth will be completely black and very fragile. Charcloth that is not done will burn with a match and will not catch from a spark. Charcloth that is done will not burn with a match and will easily catch from a spark. Try a piece of your charcloth with a ferro rod. Pieces from the top may be incomplete (not completely black) and pieces on the bottom could be burnt. If you find your charcloth not complete, you can put it back in the tin can and cook it more.



Not done – note brown color



Overdone – note crispy



Just right



The completed charcloth may be smaller in size than the original pieces. Find a suitable container to place your completed charcloth. Watch the video and read the article on how to use charcloth. Be sure to practice.

Conclusion

Making your own charcloth is rewarding and fun. A good way to go is to purchase a small tin of ready-made char cloth and refill it with your own charcloth as you use up the purchased cloth. This way you can see how the char cloth works before attempting to make your own. This also provides a very convenient storage container for your cloth. A container of char cloth as shown, can be purchased on the web site.

www.tb-gear.com



About the author:

Steve Dykeman is an experienced outdoorsman and survivalist. He has written many articles and produced many videos on subjects relating to outdoors and survival. He has been a course director and instructor to both youth and adults. He has also been a technical consultant to manufacturing companies relating to outdoor gear. He has over 40 years of experience working with space and defense related electronics. He brings his advanced technical abilities to the outdoors, exposing the many myths and fallacies.

In recent days he is educating people to survive into our uncertain future.

