

Controlling outdoor fires is a must for safety

Each year, millions of Canadians deliberately set fires outdoors. No, we haven't become a mass group of arsonists—setting barbecues and campfires is perfectly normal, but they're still fires. Know how to control them safely.

When using any barbecue, especially a gas barbecue, you want to make sure the fire spreads only as far as the underside of your food. Keep water handy to douse flames if they go out of control. Your hose or sprinkler is a possible source.

Keeping a small fire extinguisher near the barbecue is also a good idea. For gas barbecues, you don't want any flames spreading to the tank, so act quickly.

If you're using a gas barbecue, check for leaks occasionally by putting soap and water on the connections and watching for bubbles when you turn on the propane (just turn on the gas, don't spark up the unit). Leaks can be highly hazardous, as the gas is invisible, and just striking a match could create a jet of fire.

When you're camping, light wood fires in authorized areas only and avoid fires in high wind areas. Clear away leaves and other combustible materials. While sitting at a fire, avoid loose clothing, which can ignite, and bathing suits, which expose your skin to flames and sparks.

Never leave a fire unattended. When you're finished spread the burned pieces, soak them thoroughly, then cover the area with sand.

Believe it or not, some people actually

toss aerosol cans on a fire. This is extremely dangerous.

You wouldn't play with a hand grenade, would you? Well, aerosol cans, even empties, can explode when exposed to heat. Dispose of all cans according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Don't toss matches or burning cigarettes near leaves or grass, or from a car. It only takes a second to make sure the flame is out.

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find composting takes too long and requires too much effort for the end result.

How can you make the work of composting easier and more effective? According to Randy Monk, executive director of the Composting Council, add Canadian sphagnum peat moss to the compost bin. "Research has clearly shown that the combination of peat moss and compost is very beneficial," says Monk. "It's good for landscaping, horticulture and agriculture. Peat moss and compost each show their strengths when combined, making an excellent soil amendment."

Peat moss is a natural, organic soil conditioner that saves water by absorbing and holding moisture, loosens heavy soil and adds body to sandy soils. In the compost bin, peat helps produce better compost by speeding up the process, reducing odours and controlling air and water in the compost pile.

For more information on composting and other gardening activities, write for a free copy of How To... brochures by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to CSPMA, 4 Wycliff Place, St. Albert, Alberta, T8N 3Y8.

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