

Burning Point

There's no doubt about it. Fire is dangerous! That's why you learn about fire safety when you're very young. You know, for example, that you should always give matches to an adult. But if you think about it, fire can also be useful. At home, your parents may barbecue delicious meals on the grill. A fire in the fireplace can keep you warm and cozy on wintry days.

In nature, fires in forests and grasslands can be useful, too.

In fact, some fires are actually needed to keep the land healthy. Fires in nature don't always burn with huge flames and great heat. Such smaller fires clean out leaves and dried grass that have built up over a few years. They help recycle dead plants, releasing nutrients into the soil. The nutrients help new grass and other plants to grow. Many animals like to eat the tender, nutritious plants that return after a fire.

In addition, some plants actually need fire. Certain pine cones won't open and drop their seeds without the heat of a fire. Fires can kill insects that harm trees. Even burned, dead trees are

places where birds can nest or sit and watch for prey.

How to put out a campfire:

1. Drown the fire with water.
2. Use a stick to mix the ashes with the soil.
3. Scrape and chop partially burned sticks.
4. Add more water.
5. Stir with soil again.

To help keep the land healthy, trained fire specialists sometimes set fires. Conditions need to be just right, so that the fires do not get out of control. Fires started in the wrong conditions, without planning, or through carelessness can spread quickly and do a lot of damage. That's why if you live near wildlands or visit them, it's important to be very careful with fire and to follow fire safety rules.

—Did You Know...?—

... that most wild animals know how to live around fire? They can run or fly faster than most fires can move.