

Make Your Own Charcoal

So you want to try making your own lump? Well Big-R from the Big Green Egg Forum has been making his own lump and has graciously provided the following material to help you make your own lump, too.

Warnings and Disclaimers

1. Make sure that your local laws/ordinances allow outdoor fires. You may wish to take pains to ensure that your fire and its byproducts don't bother your neighbors, depending on the wind direction.
2. We take no responsibility for the following procedure or your ability to follow it or not. Fire is dangerous, so be careful.

Materials

- 55 gallon drum with lid
- 30 gallon drum with lid
- 4 fire bricks
- Wood source for lump
- Wood source for fuel
- time

Constructing The Kiln

1. Locate the drums you will need to made your kiln. You can check garages, landfills, convenience centers, auto body repair shops, cleaning services. All sorts of businesses have drums for you to drag away.
2. Cut a fuel feeder hole in the side of the 55 gallon drum near the bottom. Make the hole about 10 inches high and 18 inches wide. Use a metal cutting blade in a reciprocating saw or a jigsaw to make this cut.



3. Drill 5 holes about 3/8 or 1/2 inch in diameter in the bottom of the 30 gal drum.



Making The Lump Charcoal

1. Prepare the raw material for the lump. Big-R uses 4-inch disks of oak, partly cured (totally cured is better) and whacks them into fist sized pieces. Load/wedge as many pieces into the small drum as you can and still have the lid fit on.



2. Step 3. (C, D) Prepare for the burn. Lay two bricks flat in the bottom of the big drum and stand the other two bricks on edge to form a stand for the small drum inside the big drum. Set the small drum on top of the bricks.
3. Place the lid on the small drum, leaving it cracked for moisture to escape.



4. Place the lid on the large drum, leaving it cracked to form a chimney of sorts. You can use a piece of rebar for this.



5. Start a fire (through the fuel feeder hole) underneath the bottom of the small drum. I use 1 plastic milk jug and some paper. Layer on twig, branches and then small limb pieces until you have a good fire going. Then feed the fire with whatever wood you have to keep it going. I use split oak pieces.

6. Continue to feed the fire, hotter is better. At about 4 hours close the lid on the small drum. Most of the water should have been driven off and the lump should have begun to shrink in size. The photo shows the lump-to-be after about 3 hours.



7. Continue to burn for 4-5 more hours until out gassing stops. Outgassing is the burning of volatile elements in the lump, leaving only pure carbon charcoal. You will be able to see jets of flame (gentle or vibrant) coming from the five small holes drilled in the small drum.
8. You can finish the lump in one of two ways. One, after outgassing remove the small drum and set it in some dirt to let it cool without access to air. This takes about 12-14 hours. Alternatively, you can leave the burn alone during outgassing and let the fuel fire go out on its own. Both work well. the second way is easier but the first way seems to give less brittle lump.

9. After cooling WELL, open the small drum and harvest your own lump. It will be brittle so be careful in handling. It lights well and burns hot and long.



10. Here is the product of one session's burning sorted into the big pieces and the rest.
11. Enjoy the fruits of your labor, an 11 hour butt on homemade lump. No problems.

