

An Improvised, Efficient, & Inexpensive Fireplace

by LEWIS E. WEEKS, Jr.

Not every sow's ear will result in a silk purse; but, when necessity is the mother of invention, one may produce at least a practical pocketbook.

Such was the situation when, for the first time, we spent a few weeks, late in the fall at the island cottage on the Maine coast. All our other visits had taken place during the warm summer months. Our problem this time was the weather! Many cold, rainy days and two severe storms, one from the southeast and another from the northeast, each lasting several days, were discouraging, especially as the cottage is on the eastern side of the island. If it hadn't been for glorious, golden fall days in-between, we should have turned tail and retreated to more comfortable quarters.

The small wood burning kitchen range just wasn't adequate to keep us warm, especially in the evening, even though we bundled up in layers of sweaters and hooded jackets.

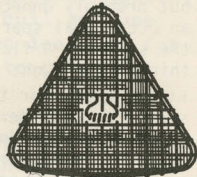
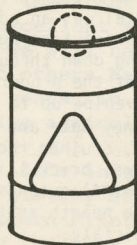
Something had to be done! Fortunately, in the chimney, there was an old stovepipe hole on the living room side; and a Franklin fireplace had long been a dream of ours merely waiting the necessary but, very slowly accumulating cash. Challenged by Mother Necessity, we decided to improvise.

A trip to the island dump solved all our problems with but two exceptions. Transportation was a bit difficult as bicycle for the long haul and wheelbarrow down the steep path for the last half mile to the cottage were the only means. Our treasures included: a rusty, badly dented thirty gallon metal drum, with several slits and holes in it; an old Pontiac hub cap; several feet of rusty quarter inch steel rod; a handful of quarter inch diameter bolts about half an inch long, with nuts; a piece of hardware cloth with half inch mesh, about two feet square; a piece of old screening about the same size; a few feet of chrome auto trim four or five inches wide; and a short piece of aluminum tubing.

It was a noisy and rather disreputable looking bicycle that bounced and clattered the three miles to the top of the hill, all the junk lashed here and there with old rope and wire also scavenged from the dump.

Tools needed were: a pair of pliers, hand drill with quarter inch drill, small metal cutting keyhole saw, wire brush, and a pair of tin snips.

A wave-rounded rock was used to pound the drum back into an approximation of its original shape. The hub cap was wired to the drum to make a bottom for it. A triangular piece was cut in the drum about four inches from the bottom for the opening of the fireplace. And an inch or two down from the top on the opposite side, a six inch hole was cut for the stovepipe. The steel rod was shaped to the fireplace opening with about an inch and a half overlap all around. The joint was aligned and held by a collar made of a strip cut from an old tin can. Over this frame was bent and crimped the hardware cloth for strength, and over all was bent the screening to keep sparks from flying.



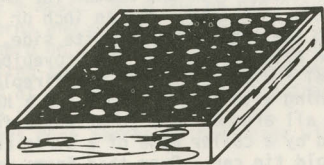
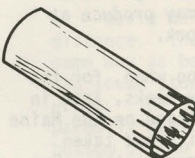
To the bottom of the triangular piece cut out to make the opening for the fireplace was bolted a flattened piece of the chrome auto trim, making the piece several inches taller so that it would overlap all around the opening and be suitable for a

removable door. The door, when used, makes a stove of the fireplace; and, though the unit is not airtight, the door makes the fireplace into a more efficient heater when it is very cold and dampens the fire at bedtime for the night.



Three pieces of the aluminum tubing flattened were shaped into brackets (see drawing) and bolted to the drum, two at the bottom and one at the apex of the opening so that either the screen or the door can be slid up under the top bracket, swung in, and set down into the two bottom ones, to be held as close to the surface of the opening as possible.

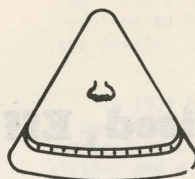
We were fortunate to have a neighbor who gave us an old piece of six inch stovepipe, although number ten tin cans with the bottoms and tops cut out and the sides slit could be made to do for pipe. The pipe had to be marked and cut as illustrated. Then the pipe was put in its hole on the back of the drum with alternate tabs bent at right angles outside to hold the pipe from going into the stove and then the others bent over from inside to hold it firmly in place.



A frame of four inch wide pieces of ordinary board (two by four could be used) placed on the floor over a piece of sheet metal, also from the dump, and filled with pebbles and sheels from the beach formed the hearth. The sheet metal was an added but probably unnecessary precaution against an occasional spark falling down through the stones. A flat rock of the proper thickness brought the stovepipe up to the right height for the chimney hole and also served as a fender. Sand, crushed rock available in various colors, brick laid loose or in mortar, or flat flagstones could also be used for the hearth as taste and materials available dictate.

The only materials we bought were a small can of black stove paint and a small can of stove cement. The cement patched the holes in the drum and sealed the pipe junction at chimney and drum. The paint, though it didn't turn our fireplace into a silk purse, did improve the appearance when applied after the loose rust had been removed with the wire brush.

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long run. It also implies that, had we put as much money into solar energy research as we did in nuclear we would be well on our way to solving our energy problems.

- Q. Then why doesn't our government gradually switch to solar energy research?
- A. I'll quote Jack Anderson of the Washington Post on that. He says: "Slick lobbyists from the nuclear industry are pressuring congressmen to deep-six (bury in the files) the explosive report. The top brass at the Energy Department would prefer to keep it buried. Secretary James Schlesinger came out of the old Atomic Energy Commission. As its chairman, he helped make the billion dollar decisions to develop nuclear energy. He has surrounded himself in the Energy Department with former associates who also are nuclear-minded."
- Q. Do you think the anti-nuclear people have a chance in view of the powerful forces against them?
- A. I think they must eventually win. Power in the last analysis rests with the people and the people are slowly beginning to stir. What happened after the last Seabrook rally may be an indication of things to come.



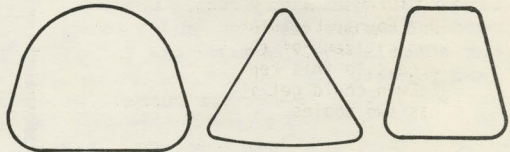
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The territory served by this magazine reaches from Plattsburg in the East to Lake Ontario in the West. It goes as far south as Pulaski and Saranac Lake, and reaches northward into Canada. One recognizable fault we perceive is that the staff is more centrally located than the distribution. Steps are being taken to correct that matter but let us add here that contributions from any reader in the form of articles, drawings, photographs, news items, etc. are welcome. You should send them to ROOTDRINKER, P.O. Box 161, Canton, New York 13617.

Expect the next issue, HARVEST 1978, towards the end of October, early November. Hopefully, we'll be back on schedule before you know it. Thank you, readers, for your support and patience.

The stove worked like a charm and made our stay not only comfortable with its warmth but cheerful as only an open fire can. In fact, we were so pleased with it that we've decided to forget about the Franklin stove, save the three hundred or so dollars it would have cost, and make do with our "practical pocketbook."

Obviously a drum in good condition would make a much neater and longer lasting fireplace. And one with both top and bottom would eliminate adding a bottom. Any sized drum can be used, either smaller or larger than the one we chose. The thirty gallon was just right for the size of our living room. A damper in the stovepipe will be added next year to give greater control of the fire and more efficiency. Any triangular shaped opening to suit ones taste can be used. The triangular shape, however is necessary so that the door will overlap when it is raised by adding several



inches to the bottom. Three-quarter or inch strap iron would be more satisfactory for the brackets that hold the screen and door in place. The stovepipe can be located on the top rear of the drum if desired. In this place, the hole will be easier to cut, as the curve of the side of the drum does not have to be taken into consideration to get a good fit. However, this installation requires an elbow and takes away some of the cooking surface on top of the drum. A handle or handles for the door and screen can be "found" or improvised from coat hanger wire. It can be installed by drilling or punching a couple of holes in the door, putting the two ends of the handle through, and bending them over on the inside. The rough edges on fireplace opening and door should be smoothed with a file after cutting with the metal saw.

