

The One-Match Fire

How to spark a flame when it really counts BY T. EDWARD NICKENS

» **IF THINGS ARE SO BAD** that you're down to one match, then it's time to quit taking chances. The secret to last-chance fire building is attention to detail long before the match comes out of your pocket. Here's the plan:

STEP ONE Begin with tinder. Collect three times as much as you think you'll need; don't stop looking till you have a double handful. Shred it into a fiberlike consistency.

Conifer pitch, pine needles, cedar bark, birch bark, and dry bulrushes all make excellent natural tinder. Lots of other common items make for good fire-starting material, too. Turn your pockets inside out for lint or candy bar wrappers. Duct tape burns like crazy; maybe there's a strip stuck to your gun case. Wader patch glue and plastic arrow fletching work too—the more variety you have, the longer the burn.

STEP TWO Gather twice as much kindling as you think you'll need, and separate it into piles of like-size pieces. Fumble for a pencil-size piece of pine at the wrong moment, and your fire will go up in smoke. You should have pieces the diameter of a red wiggler, a .22 cartridge, and a 20-gauge shell. Use a knife to fuzz up the outer edges of a few sticks for a quicker catch.

STEP THREE Start small. Use two-thirds of your tinder for starters; save the other third in case you need a second try with the dying embers of your first shot. Arrangement is important: You want to be able to get your match head near the bottom of the pile, and also to ensure that the slightest breeze pushes emerging flames toward your materials. Blow gently, and feed only the fast-burning flames.

