



Outdoors-Magazine.com

<http://outdoors-magazine.com>

Spark-Lite

OldJimbo

- Gear reviews and tests - Emergency and survival -



Publication: Friday 6 September 2002

Description :

Testing Spark-Lite fire starter.

Copyright (c) Outdoors-Magazine.com under a Creative Commons

Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike License

Many thanks to Marion David Poff for sending me one to test! Although he wrote a review, we didn't discuss that so what you get here might be new or maybe not...

Your first impression of this fire starter will depend on your experience with other fire starters. I had been assured that it was unlike regular disposable lighters and would spark after being soaked and flicked. When it did I got interested really fast! Lots of people depend on disposable lighters - but I hope that my tests and photos have shown why this may not be wise. This unit has significant advantages over disposable lighters.

You get a neat waterproof package containing a Spark-Lite and tinder. The package is durable. Out of the package the Spark-Lite mechanism resists shocks from being dropped - mostly because of its light weight. So far it overcomes all shortcomings of disposable lighters which are very fragile with covers removed to spark properly, and tend to hold water within their mechanism.

So off I went into the bush to give the little sucker a workout. Since I had noticed that it comes with a finite amount of tinder I took along some Q-Tips (pure cotton) well rubbed in petroleum jelly, and some lamp wick. It will ignite these with no problem. In the bush I lit a fire using cedar bark tinder which was ignited with one pinch of the supplied tinder. It worked well! I'm surprised that the instructions don't give some clues to preserving the tinder supply by using just a pinch of supplied tinder. I believe I could light dozens of fires with the supplied tinder by using it to ignite other natural tinder - even fine wood shavings of any dry wood.

Working with lamp wick or Q-Tips was also great. The Q-Tips were a vast improvement over matches in wind! My advice to people who rely on a Spark-Lite is to take a bunch of prepared tinder with you and rely on small amounts to ignite natural tinder. Unfortunately igniting natural tinder was a failure with those I had available. This will no doubt cause great concern to people who have used regular large ferrocium sticks. I didn't give up so easily and used a tobacco can to char some cedar wood. It was then easily ignited with the Spark-Lite. Partially charred cloth or cedar bark would have been even better. The point to all of this is that the Spark-Lite will light quite a few fires as provided. One of these fires can then be used to char tinder for the future. A can is a convenience but not a necessity as material can be buried under fine ash/silt and heated from above to char in absence of oxygen.

Conclusions:

1. This is a very light compact and durable unit. Being easy for beginners to use it fulfils its purpose very well.

Spark-Lite

2. The instructions are inadequate. Lots of cloth fibbers will not ignite, since fabric softeners often contain flame retardants. Users should be informed as to how to preserve tinder supplied and create more.
3. The supplied tinder works when wet as it is supposed to. Since the spark is small compared to a ferrocerium stick, I would suggest using pure cotton (lamp wick or Q-Tips) soaked in an 80/20 mix of petroleum jelly and paraffin wax to create waterproof durable tinder. Too much wax and it will be tough to ignite. Remember to check the Q-Tips for ignition as some kinds will not ignite - you must have pure cotton. If the cotton is soaked in PJ/wax it must be fluffed out before trying to ignite it.
4. This unit is very easy to use. With the prepared tinder it will get a fire started under adverse conditions. These make it ideal for first time users.
5. Obviously this unit can never be as dependable as a simple ferrocerium stick. For sure you would be in trouble if you had to light that first fire with natural tinder. It may be possible with cat-tail etc.
6. Overall I'd rate this unit highly for emergency use by inexperienced people - where in a tough situation they have to get a fire going quickly. We tend to forget that use of natural tinder with ferrocerium sticks takes some training just to recognize sources of tinder. As an emergency unit it will probably be packed with a ferrocerium stick or lighter. With the latter it will ignite the butane when the lighter mechanism won't due to being soaked. With the former it will give the first fire and opportunity to learn proper use.

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).