

The Cadbury Torch

A lightweight, inexpensive alternative to bamboo torches

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(I expect to include several more period lighting ideas in coming issues. If you have a light source to share, please send in some plans—M.P.)

You may have seen some of these torches around the Trimaris encampments at the war. When we built the Cadbury Camp gate, I constructed about 30 of these simple torches to line the ramparts and illuminate the inner camp.

When the supporting poles are buried securely (at least 12" deep), the torches will withstand a good wind, and, because they're not made of wicker, are probably safer than store-bought Tiki torches.

I have never claimed that these torches have period predecessors, but I have seen references to similar torch holders in the high middle ages. If anyone can document anything like them, please let me know. In the meantime, they're a hell of a lot nicer looking (and cheaper) than Tiki torches. If you can get the cans wholesale for about \$1, the total cost per torch should be about \$2.50 plus labor.

1. The Poles

The cheapest poles can be made by ripping (cutting lengthwise) a 2" x 4." If you look around, you can often find 8-foot "economy studs" for about \$1 each. Split one in two and you have two torch poles—total cost, \$.50 each. Economy studs often have chewed up edges and rough spots. All the better. Just leave them rough, and stain the poles to resemble your favorite wood.

2. Side Pieces and Hoop

Get yourself an old aluminum sign. I've never met a medievalist who had trouble getting this material. Try your city works department if you get stuck. Draw out all of your side pieces and the hoop band on the back (the non-reflective side) of the sign. I suggest you make several torches at once. Drill the holes before you cut out the pieces, to make things easier.

Now cut out the pieces. Aluminum cuts pretty easily with a sabre saw, although a "beverly" blade (a big manual set of scissors for cutting metal) works even better. Once you have all the pieces, run a hand file along each edge to take off burrs and give a slightly rounded look.

Now, use a vice (or if you don't own a vice, a C-clamp) to hold the side pieces while you bend them into proper shape. Bend the hoop around a metal bar or a log and get it roughly the right shape.

Lay all of the pieces on a piece of newspaper and spray paint them flat black on all sides. You can prime them if you want, to make the paint last a little longer.

Attach the bent side pieces to the top of the pole using hex-headed screws. Before you slip the hoop over the top of the side pieces, check for proper size by inserting one of your cans into the holder. Rivet the loop closed.

3. Cans and Wicks

Try to find a wholesale supplier of containers in your area, and order a box of unpainted 16-oz. (or larger) cans, shaped like brake fluid cans, only much bigger. If you find a source, let me know. Mine dried up. Paint the cans flat black. Remove the caps and punch a cross shape through them with an old chisel. Bend the metal flaps up. They will keep the wick from dropping back into the can.

Make your wicks from 1" cotton batting, available at most fabric stores. Fill your torches with kerosene—not diesel fuel—a plague on those who use diesel fuel!—and bask in the light.

