

Build the smoker you want

Smokers are actually pretty basic devices. They generate smoke and heat in controlled portions while giving you the space and versatility you need to smoke whatever you want. The basic idea is to have two areas in your smoker. One area is where heat creates smoke and the necessary temperatures to do your cooking while the other area hold the food in a temperature controlled, smoky environment. The vents and connections between these spaces provide the airflow necessary to keep the heat and smoke traveling while avoiding an excess of smoke that can make food bitter.

You can achieve temperature control through adjustable vents which limit airflow or you can do it by using a controllable heat source. This is the easiest way to smoke because you don't have to deal with fire tending and vent adjustments. This also allows for a very simple smoker design. Take for instance this electric [Trash Can Smoker](#). The design is very simple. An electric hot plate provides heat while wood chunks in a pan on the hot plate provide smoke. The temperature control of the hot plate allows for direct heating of the cooking chamber. This can also be accomplished with a gas burner.

Now while you've got the basic principles in mind you first need to think about whether or not you want your smoker to be portable. By portable I mean do you want to be able to move it. Smokers can be permanent fixtures on your property or they can be set up and moved if necessary. For instance Dave Lineback's Wilber D. Hog Smoker is a beautiful brick unit with lots of versatility and plenty of smoking space, however he can't exactly take it with him.

Brick or stone smokers have a lot of advantage over other kinds of smokers. Brick holds heat so once one of these smokers is up to temperature it will hold that heat very well. This levels the heat spikes that can occur in many metal designs. With a permanent structure smoker you can also add in all the features you might want. Electricity and plumbing can be added to the unit giving you a lot more versatility to your outdoor cooking area.

Of course, just because you want to use bricks or blocks doesn't mean you can't make a temporary or non-permanent smoker. Dan Gill's Rufus Memorial Smoker is a great hog cooker based on a simple design. This classic unit is perfect for a temporary smoker if you are planning a big "pig pickin'" or even a luau. This goes to show that a smoker can be built out of almost anything you have on hand.

Now that I have you thinking about whether or not you want a permanent, fixed smoker you need to access the most important resource you have on hand. Your abilities. If you are up to welding and masonry then you probably have all the skills you need to make any kind of smoker. However if you don't feel you have the skills or perhaps access to the tools you should try looking at a different type of smoker. It's best to start out with what you know and work your way up from there. Many of the people who have made impressive smokers have started out small and worked their way up. Nothing counts like experience.

Now there are a lot of people who talk about building a smoker out of a refrigerator. There was a time when this was a very popular way to build smokers, particularly cold smokers. Of course this was in the days when refrigerators were almost entirely made out of metal. These days a refrigerator is largely plastic on the inside. Plastic produces noxious and often toxic fumes when heated. While this might be okay and I really mean might, for building a cold smoker that never reaches temperatures above 90 degrees F. it is certainly not a good way to build a hot smokers where temperatures should hold around 225 degrees F. However the shape and size of a refrigerator is good for building a hot plate smoker, if you can get all the plastic parts out of the food chamber and maintain a clean smoky environment.

Whatever material you choose to use it needs to be durable enough to withstand the temperatures. It needs to take the abuse over time and not contain parts that will breakdown or produce fumes. Stone, brick and metal are all good choices. Beyond that you could get into trouble. So no matter what type of smoker you choose to build, plan it out well, experiment as you go and have fun. That's what it's all about anyway.