

Candle safety dos and don'ts

Enjoy the beauty of candles without getting burned

Candles are beautiful. They add a touch of light in the dark days of winter, and scented candles can add a pleasant aroma to a room that makes it feel warm and inviting.

But however pretty they may be, candles are also an open flame, which means they need to be carefully tended to and respected. Even one tip over or bit of loose clothing can result in a visit from the fire department or a trip to the hospital. Here are some ideas to keep in mind if you decide to burn candles in your home.

Basic candle safety

- Never forget that a candle is an open flame, and that anything combustible that it touches can easily catch fire. Keep at least a good 30 cm of space around the candle free of anything that could catch fire. According to the National Fire Protection Association, more than half of all home fires blamed on candles started because something was too close to the candle.
- Only use candle holders that are sturdy and won't tip over easily. Long, thin candles on tall, thin candle holders can be a recipe for disaster, especially if they're on a busy table full of people, plates, glasses, bottles and serving dishes being passed around. One slight nudge or pass-the-potatoes misjudgment and the candle can be knocked over.
- Use candles carefully for décor and deliberate enjoyment, but don't rely on them in the event of a power outage. Instead of moving around a lit candle for light in the darkness, have flashlights and batteries on hand or use the flashlight function on a smartphone.
- Never use a candle in a home where oxygen is being used, not even on birthday cakes. Fire doesn't behave the way you're used to when it's around pure oxygen,

Christmas considerations

Never place candles on a Christmas tree inside your home. There are countless certified electrical products on the market that can replace candles on your tree. If you choose to have candles to decorate your home at Christmas, make sure they're away from any other décor that could catch fire, and that they're on top of a stable fireproof surface that can't be easily knocked over.

Keep kids and pets away

Kids are curious, and they may want to get an up-close view if there's a pretty flame nearby. If you have kids, teach them to be careful around candles, not to play or throw things around them and to never get too close to a flame. Never leave a child unattended with a candle in the room, as it can only take a second for a lapse in judgment to lead to serious consequences.

Pets may not be as naturally drawn to candles, but a cat or dog can accidentally bump into a table and knock something over, sweep a candle over with their tail, or burn themselves if they get too close to a flame. Not only could your pet get badly burned, but the toppled candle could easily start a fire.

Incense concerns

Many of the same safety issues surrounding candles are equally applicable to incense. Keep all flammable materials away from incense, only burn it on a fireproof surface, and never leave it unattended.

If you have an electrical incense burner or essential oil diffuser, make sure it has markings from Canadian electrical certification bodies. Look for the seals of the CSA, ULC or ETLc. If you don't see the certification mark, don't buy it; if you already own one, discard it. Making your home smell nice isn't worth the risk of burning it down.