

***Is Big Stick Charcoal the same as vine charcoal?***

No. Vine charcoal is made from discarded grape vines, and comes in small thin sizes. Big Stick Charcoal is made from sustainably harvested hardwood.

***Is Big Stick Charcoal the same as willow charcoal?***

No. Willow charcoal is made from tree trimmings. It comes in larger sizes than vine charcoal, but the texture of the willow branches makes its charcoal harder and grainier. Big Stick Charcoal is as soft and black as vine charcoal, but in a bigger size.

***Is Big Stick Charcoal the same as compressed charcoal?***

No. Compressed charcoal is made from charcoal dust mixed with binders or waxes. The sticks are larger than vine or willow charcoal, but the mark they make when you draw has a slightly greasy character and is more difficult to move, blend or erase.

***What kind of wood is Big Stick Charcoal?***

Big Stick Charcoal is made from alder. Alder is a variety of birch tree with a long history. The bark of alder contains salicin, similar to aspirin. Native Americans used the bark for medicinal purposes. Alder also makes an ideal material for electric guitar bodies, producing an even and clear tone.

***How do you make it?***

First we cut alder wood to size. Then we put the raw sticks into metal tubes which restrict airflow. The tubes “cook” overnight in a wood burning oven. By making small batches, we ensure a consistent, high-quality drawing tool.

***Why are the sticks curved?***

When wood is transformed into charcoal, all of its moisture and other components cook off as gases, leaving behind only the carbon. As the stick cooks, it relaxes, revealing the growth patterns of the tree it came from. A curved stick is your guarantee of a natural product.

***Why did you start Big Stick Charcoal?***

Big Stick Charcoal was founded thanks to a life drawing class at City College of San Francisco. I liked the results of using vine charcoal for drawing, but was frustrated by the tool. Vine charcoal is delicate and small, easy to break and hard to work with. I looked for bigger charcoals, like willow charcoal, but nothing made a velvety stroke like vine charcoal. So I turned to another artist and a woodworker, and we experimented with size, wood variety, and cooking techniques until we created a drawing charcoal that is as soft and black as vine, but in a bigger size. With Big Stick Charcoal, you can focus on your art, not your tool.

***How do you use Big Stick Charcoal?***

To get the most out of Big Stick Charcoal, break off a piece about an inch and a half long. Don't hold it like a pencil; hold it sideways, like a pastel. By holding the charcoal this way, you can draw a stroke that varies in width just by pivoting your wrist.

***Is Big Stick Charcoal hard to clean up?***

Unlike many drawing tools—crayons, pastels, compressed charcoal, etc.—Big Stick is easy to clean up. The only “ingredient” is carbon/charcoal so it washes off your hands, clothes and any surface with just soap and water.

***What is the peanut for?***

The peanut is for the elephant.