

To make perfect ash for Ash Wednesday

You will need: A handful of palm crosses back from Palm Sunday
(do not make ashes from anything else, because most things produce ash that can cause chemical burns)

Strong scissors

A cast iron pan (or a similar utensil that can get very hot without damage)

A stove, preferably with a cooker hood with an extractor fan

An old metal spoon with a long handle and a thin bowl

A sheet of newspaper or similar

A pestle and mortar

An air-tight container

1. Undo the palm crosses to obtain dry palm fronds.
2. With strong scissors, cut across the palm fronds every 1–2mm (about 1/16 inch) so that no long fibres remain.
3. Spread the cut pieces in a cast-iron pan and put it on a stove at full power. Do not touch the pan when it is hot.
4. Expect some smoke and smell; use an extractor fan if possible.
5. Watch the pieces as they brown; heat them and stir them about with an old metal spoon, and perhaps a knife, until they are all at least as dark as plain chocolate.
6. Turn off the heat and allow the pan to cool.
7. Tip the pieces onto a piece of paper.
8. Fold the paper into a V and pour the pieces into a pestle and mortar.
9. Grind the pieces until they become a soft black powder.
10. Tip the powder into an air-tight container for storage.
11. Turn off the extractor fan.