



Outdoor Connect's Backpacking 101



This guide has planning & packing tips for embarking on your first backpacking adventure. This is not meant to replace your own research. Any advice should be taken at your own risk.

Planning

When planning a trip, you'll need to answer the following questions:

- How many days/nights will you have on the trail? How many miles can you cover in that time?
- Where are your start & end points? Will you be hiking a loop, an "out-n-back", or from start to end?
- What are the rules and regulations in the area you'll be hiking? Is it on federal or state land?
- What is the trail like? How's the terrain and elevation? Does it pass near bodies of water?
- Where will you sleep each night? At a campground, backcountry site, or dispersed camping?
- Where are your water sources? Are they reliable? Can you depend on them during any time of year?
- What will you eat? How many meals should you plan for? How much ready-to-eat food will you need?
- Who knows about your plans? Does someone have your itinerary? How will they contact you?

Packing

When packing for your backpacking adventure, consider the following:

- What is the carrying capacity of your backpacking pack?
 - How heavy should it be? *No more than a third of your body weight.*
- How much food and water weight will I need to carry for the trip?

Aside from food & water, what else will you need?

- **Backpack:** choose a pack that feels good on your body. Check for a good fit and padded shoulders.
- **Shelter:** a tent is usually preferred, though if you hammock camp or use a tarp, be sure you're prepared to handle adverse weather and bugs.
- **Sleeping Bag:** bring a bag that's not only packable, but comfortable. Most 0°F bags will keep you alive at that temp but won't be very comfortable unless you're wearing thermals or other layers inside it.
- **Sleeping Pad:** foam pads are easier to use and are more reliable than air pads, though they usually aren't as comfortable. Whatever you use, make sure it's lightweight and packable.
- **Cooking Stove:** a small, inexpensive backpacking stove is all you need, though my husband loves his pricier Jetboil Flash Cooking System.
- **Food Bag:** use a dry sack as a bear bag. They're waterproof and easy to hang from a tree in bear country. Some people use a plastic bear barrel, which doesn't need to be hung, but is more cumbersome and takes up a lot of pack space.
- **Water Vessel:** a water bladder is convenient, though some people prefer bottles.
- **Water Filtration System:** there are plenty of ways to filter water, though be sure you pick a method that filters particles at 0.1 micron or less. A 0.2-micron filter is insufficient for most places.
 - Filters may break at freezing temps so be sure to keep yours in your sleeping bag if you expect temps near or below freezing at night.
 - Always bring a separate water vessel (such as a water bag) for the dirty water that needs to be filtered. Don't put unfiltered water in your drinking water vessel.
- **Clothing:** for hiking, pack clothes that are breathable and dry quickly. Pack 3 pairs of socks and try sock liners. Pack thermal underwear or a clean pair of comfy clothes to wear at night in your sleeping bag. Pack layers for colder weather. Pack **rain gear**, such as a backpacking poncho, during warmer months.
- **Hiking Boots:** never break in new boots on the trail! Wear them around town or at home to break them in first. Be sure that your boots are a half or full size larger than your normal shoe size. Your feet will swell during a long hike. Also be wary of waterproof-ratings. Not all boots are waterproofed equally.
- **First Aid Kit:** have a small kit with different size bandages, alcohol wipes, antibiotic ointment, and some ibuprofen. Antihistamine cream, a safety pin, moleskin, and medical tape may come in handy too.

- **Maps:** always pack an easy-to-use and accurate map. Two versions of the map are recommended. Keep your map dry by putting it in a sealable plastic bag while you hike.
- **Communication Device:** bring a cell phone or other communication device for emergencies. Bring a portable battery charger and power cord to keep your device charged.
 - You may not have any cell signal, so always leave an itinerary with someone you trust. Make sure they know what to do in case they don't hear from you.
- **Bathroom Kit:** bring a small, lightweight backpacking shovel to dig your "poop holes" aka catholes. Bring wet wipes or toilet paper, depending on your preference. Pack-out dirty wet wipes.
- **Hygiene Kit:** a small tube of toothpaste and a toothbrush are all you need, though a hairbrush is nice too. *I also pack nail clippers, dehydrated soap sheets, and a wash cloth.*
- **Other Essentials:** pack bug spray during warmer months and sunscreen year-round. In bear country, you may want to pack a bottle of bear spray. Always pack a good amount of paracord. *You'll want ~30 ft to hang your bear bag (unless you use a barrel). It'll also come in handy as a clothesline.* Pack a headlamp and make sure it's fully charged. Bring spare batteries or a power cord as back-up.
- **Other Non-Essentials:** you may want to bring a few items that aren't necessary. That's okay as long as they will enhance your experience and don't add much weight. Just remember: every ounce counts!

There's a right way to pack your pack. As you gain experience, you'll learn to pack more efficiently.

- Start by stuffing your sleeping bag in the bottom of your pack.
 - Ditch compression sacks. Your pack should act as a compression sack. When you stuff your bag into it, it'll conform to the shape of the pack and will eliminate empty space.
- Pack heavier items in the middle, towards your back, and medium-weight items near the top.
 - Consider what you need to be accessible as you hike, and what you don't need to reach until you've made it to camp.

Safety & Environment

We'll spend less time here because this is where you should really be doing your own research.

- While embarking on your next big adventure, always keep safety on the top of your mind. Don't take big risks on the trail. You're not invincible! And if you hurt yourself, you may not get help for a while.
- Be conscious of your environment. What types of animals and plants are there? How do you respect and stay safe around them? What type of impact are you making by being there?
- Practice **Leave No Trace**.
 - Plan ahead & prepare
 - Travel & camp on durable surfaces
 - Dispose of waste properly
 - Leave what you find
 - Minimize campfire impacts
 - Respect wildlife
 - Be considerate of others

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