

Wilderness survival techniques and tips

Generalized awareness of the skills needed to survive in a wilderness situation.

Whether you are simply going camping at a commercial campground, taking a short hike, or backpacking into a pristine wilderness area... be prepared. Never leave to chance those few articles that may become lifesavers. Above all, always let someone know your itinerary and the time you plan to return.

The following is a list of items that should be included in a basic survival kit:

1. Waterproof matches (stick matches in a 35mm film container) or a disposable lighter.
2. Fire starter
3. Rigid blade knife (Preferably serrated on one side of the blade) w/ sheath
4. Folding saw
5. Compass
6. Map of the area you are in
7. Signal mirror
8. Flashlight
9. Plastic tarp
10. 50 to 100 feet of nylon cord (1/8 inch is adequate)
11. First aid kit

12.Coins for pay phones (here again a 35mm film container works well)

13.Full canteen

14.Emergency food rations

15.Water purification tablets/filter.

16.Fish hooks and fishing line

17.Police whistle

18.Toilet paper

Fire: When starting a fire find dry wood. Use the inner bark of trees, or look for the dead branches at the very bottom of fir trees. These are dead because they were denied sunlight by the branches above them. These same branches have probably protected them from getting wet. Start your fire small and gradually increase its size. Tinder will greatly enhance your chance for success. Take small branches and shred them with a knife or your fingers. You can use dead grass, bird's nests, wasp nests (unoccupied of course), inner bark from dead trees, or a strip of cloth from the tail of your shirt. Use anything that will ignite quickly. Place this in the center. Around this, build a teepee of small dry twigs. Once this is burning, slowly feed your fire with larger and larger pieces of wood. Always making sure the fire is burning freely before you progress to a larger piece of wood. Once this fire is burning do not let it go out.

Shelter: Do not make the mistake of trying to construct a large shelter. Make it just large enough to accommodate you. This is important, especially in cold climates, because you are going to have to heat it. Use the materials at hand. Dig out a pit and line it with something to insulate you from the ground. Your body heat can be lost very quickly lying on the bare ground. Use leaves, grass, or pine bows for this insulation. Create a frame with 2 "V" shaped sticks and a cross support. Cover this frame with materials at hand. Overlap them or place them in layers to make your shelter resistant to water and wind.

Water: In most areas, water is readily available. However, treat all water as if it were contaminated. Boil all water before you use it. Most organisms cannot stand up to a 10 or 12 minute boiling. Look for hills as water might be at their base. Animal trails will eventually lead you to water. Look for birds, as they will often circle a watering hole. Their flight patterns usually include a water source. Also watch the animals that you come across, they will scratch at the surface of the ground if water is just below the surface. Watch the insects. They will congregate on ground that is moist. If you are lucky enough to have a piece of plastic you can create a solar still. Another trick is to dig holes in the ground

and catch rainwater in them. Even a dry creek might still have water running underground.

Food: Starving to death is not an immediate problem. Most of us can endure 2 to 3 weeks of not eating and still survive. However, food is an important means of preserving our mental and emotional state, as well as a source of energy. If you find yourself stranded near a river or stream, fish can be a food source you would exploit. Fish can be caught with a line and hook, speared, or trapped. Watch eagles and hawks. Sometimes you will be able to scare them away from their catches. If you find a beaver dam find the weakest spot and pry it open. Stand by this small waterfall with a club and wait for fish or muskrats to come through. The beaver that built the dam is sure to come out to repair the damage. They can be eaten also. There are also many edible plants. Some are poisonous so be sure to learn how to find and prepare them before you need this skill. A good rule of thumb is to stay away from mushrooms and any plant that has a milky sap. Cattail roots, acorns, and the bark from trees are all edible. Lastly look for areas where ducks, geese, and other fowl are nesting. When they are roosting, you might be lucky enough to bring one or two down by throwing your club into their midst. If not the eggs they leave behind are edible.

Signal for help:

The most noticeable signal is your fire. It is easily seen at night. Be sure to build your fire where it can be seen. Build it in a clearing, hilltop, or on a lakeshore. During the daytime the smoke from your fire can be seen for many miles and in most wilderness areas there are firewatchers and rangers that investigate smoke sightings. Three fires arranged in a triangle, 100 feet apart is a distress signal to aircraft. Also when using hand/arm motions to signal aircraft hold both your arms above your head. This is the sign for help. One arm upraised indicates "No Assistance Required". Signal mirrors, lids from a can, broken glass with one side coated with mud, a brightly colored jacket or shirt tied to a long stick can all be used to attract attention.

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