

Camping Gear 101

When's the last time you went camping? Last week? Last summer? Maybe you haven't gone since you were a kid. No matter how much experience you have, camping is the ultimate outdoor adventure. The key to the perfect outdoor getaway, however, is having the right camping gear.

Camping is a great adventure, whether you're planning your first trip, or you've done it a million times before. Having the right camping gear is crucial to having a safe and satisfying wilderness vacation. Before you head for the hills, it's a good idea to make a checklist of all essential items you'll need for your campout. Waiting until you're in the middle of the forest is too late to realize what you've forgotten.

Plan and Pack

Give yourself time to pack, rather than throwing together the essentials at the last minute. Make a list of everything that you want and need, as well as those "just in case" items. As you pack, check each item off of your list to be sure you're not overlooking anything. There are so many things to think about; sometimes this is the only way to make sure you've got all of your must-have camping gear.

Sleep and Shelter

One surefire way to turn a camping trip from paradise to purgatory is to pack shoddy bedding and poor shelter. You need to be warm, dry and comfortable when camping. Sleeping under the stars might seem romantic, until you find yourself exposed to rain, frost, insects or curious four-legged creatures that may visit during the night. Bring along proper shelter that will keep you safe and secure. Bring enough blankets to stay warm and for heavens sake, don't forget your pillow.

Personal Care

No one cares what you look like in the forest, so you don't need to bring hair gel or eyeliner. You will, however, need to bring insect repellent, sunscreen, and toilet paper. You might also want to bring soap, a hairbrush, shampoo, toothbrush and other personal care essentials. Make sure that everything, particularly towels and toilet paper, are packed in water-resistant bags.

Clothes

Decide how long you'll be staying at your camp, and pack a change of clothes for each day. Then, pack a little extra. You'll get dirty while camping, and wet if Mother Nature throws a little rain your way, so be prepared. Unless you have a river and a length of rope handy, washing and drying your clothes in the woods is not an option. Even if it's the middle of July, bring long pants, warm shirts and extra socks for cool evenings around the campfire.

Medicine and First Aid

Remember the first rule of Scouting while you're packing your camping gear: Always Be Prepared! Go through your medicine cabinet, and bring along anything you might need. Pack the medicines you need to take on a daily basis, and don't forget your vitamins and pain relief pills. If you have allergies, bring appropriate medication or an epi-pen. A properly stocked first aid kit is always essential, along with a sharp outdoor knife and scissors.

Cooking

Everything tastes better when cooked over a campfire. Just be sure that you have the essentials to prepare your outdoor gourmet feast. Pack a clean grill, metal spatula and tongs. Bring a bowl for mixing food, a cutting board, paper plates, cups, silverware, aluminum foil, dish soap and linens. If you have access to a good fishing spot where you're camping, make sure you pack a sharp filet knife and an iron frying pan. Most importantly, don't forget to bring garbage bags to clean up camp at the end of your stay.

When you take the time to pack carefully and bring along all of the essential camping gear, you'll have an outdoor adventure to remember, for all the right reasons.