

How to pitch a tent

Pitching a tent and keeping the elements away from you and your belongings is a crucial step towards having a safe and enjoyable time in the outdoors. It's easy to learn how to pitch a tent properly – it just takes a little time and effort to master.

To me, no other outdoor skill makes people more irritable and frustrated with each other than pitching a tent. However, when everyone involved is up to speed, pitching a tent is the least of anyone's worries. The following tent-pitching guide might be useful for you so you can keep everybody warm and happy

What You'll Need

This list can change depending on the area in which you intend to camp, but normally you should bring:

- Tent
- Rainfly
- Tent poles
- Guylines
- Stakes
- Tarp
- Replacement Poles/Stakes
- Repair kit

At some point you may lose some of these items, but all is not lost. All these items can be improvised, excluded or replaced. An example is one time I lost a tent in a river. After retrieving it I ended up losing one of the poles to the current. Rather than replacing the pole, I simply used some rope and nearby trees to stretch out the tent. You may not need all of these items every time you go camping, but it can pay off to have them all just in case.

The Step-By-Step Guide

Pre-Trip Preparation

When it comes to any activity in the outdoors, including camping, you need to stay focused to keep yourself not just safe, but comfortable. While safety is your ultimate goal, you must also take your comfort into account.

There will always be a certain level of discomfort when you're away from home, but there are limits to what you can withstand. Even if you can survive in an underprepared situation, if you're not dry and warm, you won't be able to think straight, let alone enjoy your time. Being prepared is the best way to make sure you keep a clear mind and keep yourself safe.

- **Get to know your tent**

Get to know the particular features of your tent, how it fits in its carrier and what its capabilities are. Knowing your tent's capabilities will help you better adapt to anything which the outdoors might put you through on your adventures.

- **Tent condition**

Look over the tent and rainfly's condition. Look for holes in the material and repair them if there are any. Take an inventory of poles, stakes, and guylines and replace any which are missing. Depending on the condition of your tent, you may want to replace it.

- **Climate and weather**

It's just as easy to bring too much tent as it is to not bring enough. Consider what the climate is going to be like on your trip in order to determine what kind of tent you need. While almost all tents can handle mild conditions, some are better than others once the weather becomes more extreme. Make sure the tent you have matches the situation you'll be facing.

- **Write a checklist**

The best way to begin your preparation is to write a checklist. A checklist will help you keep everything you need organized and will also help you see if you've forgotten anything. Remember to check your list right before you leave to make sure you don't leave anything behind.

Where to pitch your tent

Pitching a tent is as much about where to do it as how to do it.

- When choosing the perfect place to put up your tent, **look for flat, sheltered ground** free from tree trunks and roots.
- If a hilly pitch is your only option, **make sure your head is at the top of the slope and feet at the bottom** when lying down. This will help stop you from rolling out of bed at night.
- If it's raining, scout out a spot where the ground isn't waterlogged. **Avoid ditches and other concave patches of land, as these collect puddles.** Try to pitch on higher ground as it tends to be drier.
- While camping next to a lake with gorgeous views sounds dreamy, be aware that **insects tend to gather next to water.**
- It can seem smart to camp under trees for shade and shelter, but there's also a risk of sap, bird droppings and debris falling on your tent. **Block out wind by pitching next to a bush or your car instead.**
- **Think about where you're putting your tent's entrance.** You might like to have it facing outwards towards a view and/or away from the eyes of other campers.
- If you have an electric pitch, **make sure your tent is close enough to the plug socket** to access the hookup from inside.
- **Try to leave enough outdoor space for alfresco cooking and relaxing** while also allowing other campers ample room. At least five metres is a good rule of thumb.
- **Decide whether you want to be near the bathroom** and other campsite amenities. This can be convenient at night but tends to mean you'll be in a busier part of the park with more foot traffic.
- **Check the weather forecast and wind direction.** It's useful to know the angle for pitching your tent ahead of time.

Pitching Tips

Each tent has a different pitching process, so make sure to read the manual and instructions which are provided. If you don't have access to the manual, almost every tent follows the same following steps:

1. Lay out the tent
2. Stake the tent
3. Assemble the poles
4. String the poles through the guides and insert into the proper corners (tent should lift at this point)
5. Drape/connect the rainfly across the top, aligning its zipper with the tent's zipper
6. Stake/tie down guylines to keep the rainfly off the tent

Guyline Guidance

The purpose of a rainfly is to keep moisture off the tent. If the rainfly lays against the wall of the tent, it will leak water into the tent. The guylines are what prevent the rainfly from doing this. When you set them up, make sure they can withstand any wind or movement. Waking up to a leaky tent as a result of a fallen guyline is never a pleasant experience.

Guylines also add a structure to the rainfly which helps keep snow and water from building up on the tent. If a guyline won't stay in the ground, try to tie it around a tree, rock, or other heavy object.

8 steps to pitching your tent perfectly

1. Pick a place to pitch

Using the guidance above, choose the ideal place for your tent. You'll want plenty of room for your guy lines, so make sure there's at least three metres between your site and any obstacles. Place the side of the tent with the strongest pole structure facing any wind. When camping in hot weather, angling the door towards the breeze helps to cool down your tent's interior.

2. Clear space for your groundsheet

Brush twigs, stones or anything else that may tear your tent away from the pitching area, then put your groundsheet down in your chosen position. If you have a tent footprint, or an extra section of protective tarp, lay this down first. Put your tent on top of the groundsheet, facing upwards. Plug pegs loosely into all four corners of the tent to ensure everything stays secure for the moment.

3. Check if it's a flysheet-first tent

Take a look at the manual and see if it says to get the flysheet or inner up first, then tackle this part of the job. Some tents have attached inner and outer layers, which speeds up the task at hand. If it's a flysheet-second option, place the tent's interior on top of the footprint, matching both sections of material corner to corner. Make sure your doorway is facing exactly where you want.

4. Connect your poles

Now it's time to start tackling your tent's poles. Fix them together first, inserting each adjacent pole with care. Don't just let them spring into place, as this can cause damage.

5. Attach the poles to the frame

There are typically two ways in which your tent's internal body will attach to the poles: with sleeves or clips. Either thread the poles through the sleeves or clip the material to the frame, beginning in one corner before moving on to the opposite corner.

Don't pull the poles through the sleeves – if they're joined up by elastic or bungee cords, yanking will force them to separate and you'll have to start all over again. It's best to push the poles instead.

6. Set up the tent

Next, attach the poles to the pin and grommet (or ring and pin) you'll find at each of the four corners of your tent's inner body. This can require a little force as the whole structure needs a certain level of tension to stand upright.

To avoid breakages, bend the frame carefully instead of putting pressure on individual poles. Then add the flysheet – your waterproof cover – if this is separate from the tent body, making sure to match the inner doorway up with the flysheet's entrance.

Some tents use velcro to affix the rain fly to the poles. Others include bungee cords that stretch the cover overhead and then connect underneath the poles. Have a look at the instructions to be 100% certain which applies to your tent.

7. Peg the tent in properly

One of your final tasks when pitching a tent is to stake everything down securely. Push your pegs into the ground at a 45-degree angle – with the hook pointing away from the tent – then hammer them in with a mallet or rock if the ground is hard. Avoid stamping on the stakes with your foot as this risks breakages.

Here's our guide to all the [different tent pegs available](#).

8. Finish up

Once your tent is erect, pull the poles as far apart as possible to make sure the material is nice and rigid. This gives you maximum room overhead and also means that rain will stream down the flysheet and away from the roof. [Tying your guy lines properly](#) also helps prevent water from pooling above you. To check the tension of the tent, make sure that the seams on the fly align with the seams of the tent body and its poles.

Top tips for pitching a tent on your own

The more hands the better when putting up a tent, but you can certainly pitch one alone. Follow the above steps, but keep these tips in mind too:

- Consider buying a pop-up tent if you do a lot of solo camping, as these are much easier to set up alone.
- Place something heavy – perhaps a stone – on each corner of the tent after you lay it out on the ground to stop it from flying away in gusts of wind.
- For extra ease, leave just enough of the peg exposed to let you slip a guyline over it easily.

Camping Skills.....By: MG. Joseph J. Dzinga

- Even if the weather seems fine, it's worth using all the guy ropes and peg points – rainstorms and high winds could appear in no time, and it'll be trickier to fix this quickly when alone.

How to pitch a tent in bad weather

We've created specific guides to camping in [rain](#), [high winds](#) and [storms](#), but here are some quick tips for putting up your tent when conditions are far from ideal.

- Pitch up while using the side of your car for shelter. It makes a great wind breaker.
- Bring waterproofs to wear while putting up the tent, then pop them in a plastic bag as soon as you're indoors and dry.
- Put the flysheet up first if you can, instead of the inner body, so you have a certain level of protection while pitching.
- Don't skip the pegs and guy ropes. While it's tempting to get inside as soon as possible, it's essential that your tent is fully stable when [camping in bad weather](#).
- Place your tent at an angle so the windflow spreads more evenly across it.

Campsite Selection

To help remember the things that are important to camp site selection, remember the six W's:

Wind- Find areas that are protected from the wind. This requires knowing or guessing at the normal wind direction (hint look at the direction trees are leaning and the current wind direction)

Water- Fresh water should be available for drinking, beware of drainage areas, flooding and other water related hazards. Marshy areas can have a high mosquito population that can make camping miserable.

Weather- Knowledge of the weather patterns of an area can help you decide the best location for the camp site.

Wild things- Beware of signs of large mammals such as bear, wolves, and mountain lions. Also watch out for the small wild things such as snakes, spiders, ticks, biting flies and mosquitoes.

Wood- Adequate wood should be available for a campfire, and no dead wood above sleeping area. Survey the trees to make sure that they will not fall on you in strong winds.

Willingness- Make sure the owner of the property is willing for you to camp on it. Make sure you have the proper permits for camping areas.

Fire Safety

- Locate the fire in a safe place. It should be clear for 10 feet (3 meters) all around.

- Do not light a fire beneath overhanging branches.
- Do not use accelerants, such as lighter fluid, gasoline, kerosene, etc. Learn to light a fire without these.
- Put the fire out **completely** before leaving it. If it's too hot to put your hands in the ashes, it's not sufficiently out. Douse it down with water, turn the coals with a shovel, and be sure to extinguish every coal and ember.
- Do not build a fire on top of flammable material such as grass or leaves.
- Cut away the sod (keep it moist so it stays alive, and replace it before your leave), and clear away the duff and litter.
- Keep fire extinguishing supplies handy and near the fire. A bucket of water or sand, or a fire extinguisher are recommended.
- Do not remove burning sticks from a fire.
- Watch for embers that escape the fire pit and extinguish them immediately.
- Wear proper footwear around a fire.
- Be aware that paper, cardboard, and leaves create floating embers that rise out of the fire pit and may land dozens of yards away.
- Do not light a fire when conditions are adverse (high winds, or drought conditions).

Dos and Don'ts: Pitching a Tent

Most of the dos and don'ts of pitching a tent may seem like common sense, but some you might not think of. Here are some which might help.

Dos

- Set your tent up in a dry area
- Make sure that everything which can be tied or staked down is firm and snug
- Keep your dirty gear outside the tent

Don't

- Set up your tent in a dry riverbed
- Pitch your tent right next to a fire
- Force anything which won't move easily – it could rip
- Eat any kind of food inside the Tent.