



CAMPING 101

The beginners guide to getting started

Hello!

We're so excited that you're interested in going camping! We've been camping together for 14 years and some of our best memories come from our trips.

This booklet is a look at some of the basics you'll need for a camping trip. At a minimum, you'll need some shelter, something to keep you warm and comfortable while you sleep, and something to eat. The focus is on campground camping, since it's the best place to start and see if you even like this activity.

This is NOT an in-depth, how-to kind of booklet. If you're looking for something like that, we highly recommend buying [The Happy Camper](#) by Kevin Callan.

We have plenty of trip reports and gear reviews on the blog at argosgirloutdoors.com if you're interested, and a few videos on our [YouTube](#) channel.

Rebecca & Darrell





Where to Go Camping

There are plenty of options available when it comes to finding a location to go camping. The first of those places is your **backyard**. If you've never gone camping before, your best bet is to try it close to home, where it's easy to head indoors if you prefer. If you have a backyard, set up your tent on the weekend and spend a night out there to see how things go.

CAMPGROUNDS

For your first camping trip, book a campsite at a campground. These offer your amenities like washrooms, potable water, sometimes showers/laundry/dish washing areas, electricity if needed, staff that can help with any issues, firewood for sale, etc.

Some places to look for camping include:

- **Ontario Parks** - <https://reservations.ontarioparks.com/>
- **Parks Canada** - <https://reservation.pc.gc.ca/>
- **Conservation Authorities** - <https://conservationontario.ca/>
 - Grand River Conservation Areas - <https://www.grcacamping.ca/>
 - Albion Hills - <https://trca.ca/parks/albion-hills-campground/>
 - Saugeen Conservation - <https://saugeen.goingtocamp.com/>
- **Private Campgrounds**

BACKCOUNTRY & CROWN LAND

Backcountry and crown land camping is a different ballgame that lets you get away from everyone, but you need to have some camping skills. Start with campgrounds before venturing to these options.

Find Some Shelter

Sure, you can sleep under the stars, with just a sleeping bag and no tent for cover. But if it rains? What if the bugs are bad? It's no fun to learn how to camp in those circumstances. Try one of the following options instead.

SLEEP IN YOUR CAR

If you've got a vehicle with enough room, you can sleep in it. Fold down the seats, grab some blankets, and you're good to go. There are also tent options that attach to your car or truck, giving you more room.

TENTS

The most popular shelter option for camping. A good tent will protect you from weather and bugs, and be easy to set up. You can borrow a tent for your first outing, but remember that a bad tent will often make for a bad trip. Be careful what you get. When purchasing a tent, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- **How big do you want it?** If you want it to sleep two adults squished together, a 2-person is good. If you want them to be comfortable, get a 4-person.
- **Do you want to stand up in it?** A lot of tents don't have that kind of height.
- **How weather-proof do you want it?** A full fly, the outer layer you put on separately, will give you the best protection from wind and rain.
- **What's your budget?** When you're just getting into camping, a cheap tent from Walmart or Canadian Tire will do the job.



Always dry your tent out between trips. If you put it away wet, it will turn into swiss cheese before you know it.



RVs & TRAILERS

Tents aren't practical for everyone. There are countless reasons why sleeping on the ground may not be an option. If that's the case for you, consider renting a trailer or RV to experience camping. There are plenty of rental options available, or you could buy a used trailer if you're feeling more serious about getting out. From teardrop trailers, to tent trailers, to large travel trailers, fifth wheels, and motorhomes, there's a style to suit everyone's needs. If you go this route you'll need to consider the size of campsites and whether they offer electricity.

Get A Good Night's Sleep

SLEEPING BAGS

You don't need to break the bank when it comes to sleeping bags, especially if you're driving a vehicle to the campsite. In this case, a sleeping bag can be heavier and bulkier than if you were taking it on a backpacking trip or canoeing trip. You'll want to consider the following:

- **Temperature Rating** - If you only camp in the summer, something rated down to 6° C will be fine. Colder temps? Find something better.
- **Shape** - Rectangle is better if you toss and turn and easier to zip to another bag. Mummy is easier to warm up.
- **Material** - Choose a material that is comfortable for you.

Hang your sleeping bag out in the sun for a day between trips. This will help keep it fresh and dry. Most sleeping bags can be washed using gentle cycles and dried using low heat. Refer to the instructions on your particular sleeping bag.





BEDDING

If buying a sleeping bag isn't in the budget, take blankets from home. Bring several blankets and sheets to make this comfy and keep you warm.

PILLOWS

Some people sleep fine without a pillow. For the rest of us, there are options. The first is to **use your clothes**. Either just pile them under your head, or put them in a bag that you can then use as a pillow. **Bringing your pillows from home** is another option, though remember that there's a good chance they'll get dirty. A cost-effective option is to buy an **air pillow**. It takes up little room and you can blow it up when at camp.

AIR MATTRESSES & SLEEPING PADS

If you already have these things handy, take them with you to keep your back comfortable when sleeping on the ground. A yoga mat is a great option for a sleeping pad that you may already have. Air mattresses and sleeping pads are an expense you don't need to have for your first trip, though.



If you take an air mattress or air sleeping pad camping, bring a patch kit. These have a tendency to get holes.



You Can't Have Enough Socks

The important things to know about clothes for camping are:

- **Wear comfortable clothes**
- **Bring many layers (more than you think you'll need)**
- **You need extra socks**
- **Always pack rain gear**

Don't trust the forecast and don't feel like you need special clothes. Yes, you absolutely can hike in jeans. Other pants may be more comfortable, but use what you've got.

Don't Burn The Food



One of the best parts of camping is the food. There's nothing like steak cooked over the fire after a long day of fishing, paddling, hiking, or relaxing.

You have 3 options for preparing meals:

1. Bring already prepared meals that don't need to be cooked (like sandwiches, salads, etc.)
2. Cook over the fire
3. Use a camp stove

COOKING OVER THE FIRE

Nothing says camping like food cooked over a fire. You should **bring a grill** of your own to cook on, since people are gross and leave the park grills in terrible shape. You'll also need to **buy wood**, which can be done at the park, or somewhere close to the park. Never transport firewood out of an area as it can contain invasive species.



CAMP STOVE

Even if you want to cook over the fire, you may find that it's difficult to get a fire going, or there could be a fire ban that prevents you from starting one. Always take a camp stove. There are so many different sizes and styles of stoves out there that whole chapters could be written about them.

When you're starting camping, and visiting campgrounds, and will have your car with you, you can't go wrong with a Coleman 2-burner stove. This is the classic camp stove most of us will immediately think of and it works great. There are other brands that may have a cheaper version of this stove and there's nothing necessarily wrong with them. Just make sure to read the reviews before making any purchase. This stove uses propane, so you'll need to bring some with you. Don't forget lighters or matches! Igniters can fail.



Bring a tarp. A tarp can provide protection from the weather and give you an area to hang out in, outside of your tent.

COOK SET

You're going to need stuff to hold your food. Pots and pans, maybe a kettle, some plates, utensils, etc. The easiest thing to do when starting out is to bring these from home, as long as they're not breakable. Another option is to pick some stuff up at the local dollar store.

The best option is to buy a camping cook set from somewhere like Canadian Tire or Decathlon. These are meant for camping and you can often find nesting kits to save you some space.

FOOD

What food you should bring is highly subjective. Everyone's tastes are different, as are everyone's needs. Here are a few tips to put you on the right path.

- **Bring as little food as possible that needs to stay cold**
- **Simple is best**
- **Tortillas and Naan pack better than buns and bread**
- **Bring lots of water (though most parks have potable water)**
- **Keep food inside your car or bear bins, and never take into your tent**
- **Bring extra food**
- **Don't forget the snacks**

We bring dehydrated or freeze-dried meals on every camping trip, even if they're not on our meal list. They make great back-up meals if you're too tired to cook, because all you have to do is add boiling water. Kraft Dinner & hot dogs, soup, oatmeal, and pancakes are all easy, simple meals to make when camping.

Final Words

Bad weather happens. Bugs happen. Accidents happen. But a good attitude goes a long way to making a great memory. Have fun, adapt when needed, and appreciate the little things.

Camping is a fantastic way to enjoy the outdoors, whether you go with others or go by yourself. Unless roughing it appeals to you, and everyone else in your group, take along some comforts. Remember, **you go camping to THRIVE, not SURVIVE.**



Places to Buy Gear

There are plenty of places you can buy camping gear, and no one place is better than the other. Buy from somewhere that is accessible to you and has items within your budget. Here are some suggestions for getting started.

- Walmart - <https://www.walmart.ca/en>
- Canadian Tire - <https://www.canadiantire.ca/en.html>
- SAIL - <https://www.sail.ca/en/>
- Mountain Equipment Company (MEC) - <https://www.mec.ca/en>
- Decathlon - <https://www.decathlon.ca/en>
- Amazon - <https://www.amazon.ca/>
- Outdoors Oriented - <https://outdoorsoriented.com/>
- Canadian Outdoor Equipment - <https://www.canadianoutdoorequipment.com/>
- Facebook Marketplace
- Facebook Buy & Sell Groups
- Facebook Camping Groups
- Kijiji

Camping Checklist

Sleeping Stuff

- Tent
- Tent pegs
- Sleeping bag or blankets
- Sleeping pad
- Pillow
- Socks
- Underwear
- Pants/shorts
- Tops
- Jacket
- _____
- _____
- _____

Kitchen Stuff

- Cooler or other food container
- Food
- Water
- Garbage bag
- Lighter/matches
- Cook stove
- Fuel
- Pots/Pans
- Plates
- Utensils
- Cups
- Dish towels
- _____
- _____
- _____

Other Stuff

- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Toiletries
- Medication
- First Aid kit
- Chairs
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Tarp and rope
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Trip Specific Stuff

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