Camping Equipment – Level 1

Tents

Camping equipment comes in all styles and sizes from a little backpacking tent to a 30 foot long RV. You walk into Gander Mountain or Cabela's and you see 50 different sleeping bags, 30 to 40 different tents, 10 different camp stoves and enough lanterns to light up the cosmos! All I want to do is leave the store when I am overwhelmed with so many products. Where do you start?

Right here, is where you start. We will walk you through the basics tents, sleeping bags, camp stoves, lanterns and more. We will stick to the basics but provide you with information if you want to go deeper into the subject.

OK, let's get started

How to Choose a Tent

Camping with family or friends is a regular summer pastime for many of us. Whether the campground itself is the main attraction or it's simply your base camp for nearby activities, here's how to find the right home-away-from-home.

Types of Family Tents

Tents that can sleep four or more campers are considered to be family type tents. Here are the basic design options:

- **Cabin-style tents:** These upright styles offer the easiest in/out access. Their near-vertical walls create the most livable space, which is a nice advantage. Some models come with family-pleasing features such as room dividers and an awning.

- **Dome-style tents:** The larger cousin of the classic backpacking domes, these offer superior strength and wind-shedding abilities, both of which you'll appreciate on a stormy night. They stand tall, but their walls have more of a slope which slightly reduces livable space.

- **Screen rooms and sun shelters:** They usually cover the camp picnic table or are pitched for a day at the beach, though they can double as sleeping shelters if needed. With all-mesh walls, screen houses excel in warm conditions and keep occupants shielded from bugs, but not rain.

Weight is far less of a concern for a family camping tent than it is for a backpacking tent, as most family tents are carried only from car to campsite.

Why is there such a variance in Price for the same style Tent?

Family tents are sold at discount stores across the land, sometimes at amazingly low prices. Outdoor specialty stores, meanwhile, can carry models that can cost upwards of $500. They look about the same, so what's the big difference?
As is often the case, you get what you pay for. In calm weather, a bargain tent may serve you just fine—for a while. The real difference is the quality of materials, which tends to become apparent in bad weather or after your first few outings. Here are some tips to compare a tent's quality:

- Poles: Aluminum is stronger and more durable than fiberglass
- Zippers: YKK zippers resist snagging and breaking better than others
- Materials: Higher-denier fabric canopies and rain-flies are more rugged than lower-denier ones.
- Rain-fly: A full-coverage fly offers better weather protection than roof-only styles.
- Detailing: Guyout loops let you batten down the hatches in bad weather.
- Floor design: Seam taping and higher-denier fabrics reduce the chance to leakage from below and from corners.

Bottom line: If camping is an annual activity for your group, consider the long-term advantages of having a quality tent. Similarly, if you camp in areas where wind and storms are a threat, the same advice holds.

Tent Setup and Livability

There are some things that you need in a tent, others that you may want in a tent and then there are other things that having would be really nice. You need to determine what is important and what you can live without. Everything that you will list as important will have an affect on the price you pay for the tent.

Headroom
This is listed as "peak height" on spec charts. If you like being able to stand up when changing clothes or just enjoy the airiness of a high ceiling, then look for a tall peak height.

Ease of Access
Does the tent have one door or two? What shape is the door, and how easy is it to zip open and shut? Cabin-style tents tend to shine in this area.

Ease of Setup
A tent's pole structure usually determines how easy or hard it is to pitch. Fewer poles allow faster setups. It's also easier to attach poles to clips than it is to thread them through "continuous" pole sleeves. Many tents offer a combination of both clips and short pole sleeves in an effort to balance strength, ventilation and setup ease.

Rain-fly Coverage
A rain-fly is a separate waterproof cover designed to fit over the roof of your tent. Two types are common.

- Roof-only rain-flies
- Full-coverage rain-flies

Packed Size
How big is the tent when packed? Small-car and motorcycle campers find this specification especially important.

Ventilation
Mesh panels are often used in the ceiling, doors and windows. This allows views and enhances cross-ventilation to help manage condensation.

Freestanding
Virtually all family tents these days are freestanding. This means they do not require stakes to set up. The big advantage of this is that you can pick up or easily slide a freestanding tent and move it to a different location prior to staking. You can also easily shake it out before you take it down.

Entry cover or vestibule
This shelter attaches to a tent for the purpose of storing your dusty boots or for keeping your daypack out of the rain. It can be either an integral part of the rain-fly or an add-on item that's sold separately.

Interior Loops and Pockets
A lantern loop is often located at the top-center of the ceiling to allow you a handy place to hang your lantern. Gear loft loops on tent walls can be used to attach a mesh shelf (almost always sold separately) in order to keep small items such as keys or a headlamp off of the tent floor, or to attach a clothesline to air out wet items. Similarly, interior pockets can help keep your tent organized.

- Gear loft loops
- Guy-out Loops

Higher-quality tents will include loops on the outside of the tent body for attaching guy lines. Guy lines allow you to batten down the hatches during high winds.

Key Accessories

Footprint
A footprint is a custom-fitted ground-cloth (sold separately) that goes under your tent floor. Tent floors can be tough, but rocks, twigs, grit and dirt eventually exact a toll and can lead tares or punctures in the tent floor. A footprint costs less to replace or repair than the tent itself. For a family tent that gets a lot of in/out foot traffic, this is especially useful and highly recommended. Also, because footprints are sized to fit your tent shape exactly, they won't catch water like a generic ground-cloth that sticks out beyond the floor edges. Water caught this way flows underneath your tent and can seep through even tiny holes in the floor fabric.

Gear Loft
Most tents come with a few attached pockets to let you keep small items off of the tent floor. A gear loft is an optional interior mesh shelf that can tuck a much greater volume of gear out of the way.

Other Optional Nice-to-Haves

- Stakes for sandy-soil campsites
- Broom and dustpan
- Inside/outside floor mat
- Battery-powered ventilation fan

Summary
Once you know what size tent you want, your biggest decision is really quality. For occasional outings in placid weather, an inexpensive tent might suffice. But if camping is a frequent summer activity for your crew, you'd be wise to invest in a quality tent to better ride out storms and provide years of dependable use.

Back Pack tents

How to Choose Backpacking Tent:

A backpacking tent offers so much—a cozy dry zone when raindrops fall, a patch of privacy in wide-open spaces, a fabric fortress that buffers you from ill-mannered insects.

Choosing the right one for you involves:

- Evaluating your personal preferences and the conditions you commonly experience.
- Finding the right balance among a trio of factors: **space**, **weight** and **price**.

Secondary factors can also play a role in your decision:

- Weather expectations
- Design features
- Ease of setup

Once you compare your preferences to these factors, you can narrow your choices.

Backpacking Tents Things to Consider
The following is a list of the top things to consider when determining what backpacking tent you would want to purchase:

- Space
- Weight
- Price
- Weather
- Features
- Sleeping capacity

Space:
Backpacking tents are come in different per-person capacities: 1-person (solo), 2-person, 3-person and 4-person. To keep weight low, tents are usually designed to fit snugly. The resulting space is often a little more compact than many people prefer.

Weight:
Solo tents range between 2 and 3 pounds. Two-person tents commonly range from 3 to 5 pounds, but may reach up to 6 or drop down to almost 2 pounds. Aim for a per-person weight of less than 3 pounds. Getting close to 2, or even less, is excellent. Realize, though, that a low per-person weight usually results in a snug interior.

Price:
Two-person tents range from $100 to $500; the majority are priced near the middle of that range. A higher price tag usually buys you extra refinements and lower weight. If you backpack infrequently, aim for the lower end of that range.

Weather:
Most backpackers choose a 3-season tent, meaning it's suitable for the moderate weather of spring, summer and fall. If you often camp in warm or humid conditions, search out tents with lots of ventilating mesh panels. Several tents have canopies (upper sections) that use 100% mesh.

Mesh panels are nice for stargazing on mild nights when a rain-fly is not needed.
If you plan on camping where the nights get chilly you should consider an extended-season tent. If you plan on camping where there are sustained winds or planning to venture out in winter months for winter camping, then you should be considering an expedition/mountaineering tent, also known as a 4-season tent.

The basic survival motto of always be prepared means that when selecting a backpacking tent it should be selected for the worst conditions expected on your trip. This may mean that if you do a lot of backpack camping you may have to have two or more tents.

Features:

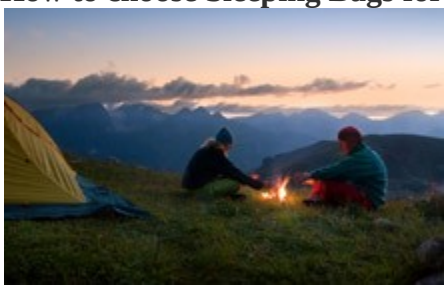
- **Doors.** Very light tents often include a single door at the head end. Many multi-person tents offer 2 doors, giving the sleepers a separate entry and exit point so exiting the tent easier and you will disturb the other person less if you need to get up in the middle of the night.

- **Vestibules.** These are extendable sections of a tent's rain-fly (requiring stakes and a maybe a few guylines) that create a sheltered dry zone outside your tent for stashing footwear and other gear. Nearly all tents offer at least 1, though they vary in size by tent model. If vestibules are important to you, look for high square foot numbers in tent specifications.

Setup:
Most tents are freestanding and you do not need stakes to hold them in place for support. This generally results in a fast setup. If the need arises, freestanding tents are simple to relocate—just lift them by their poles and carry them to a new spot.
In general, the more pole sections a tent includes, the more complex its setup might appear. After a couple of setups, though, the steps of erecting a backpacking tent become an automated, almost instinctive process.

Sleeping bag

How to choose Sleeping Bags for Camping?



While backpacking bags focus on minimizing weight, sleeping bags for car or family camping are all about comfort. These bags are typically wider, softer, cushier and less expensive than their backpacking counterparts.

Pick a Temperature Rating
A sleeping bag's **temperature rating** identifies the lowest temperature at which a bag is intended to keep the average sleeper warm. When a bag is described as a "20 degree bag," it means that most users should remain comfortable if the air temperature drops no lower than 20°F. These ratings assume that the sleeper is wearing a layer of long underwear and using a sleeping pad under the bag.

Metabolism varies from person to person, and sleeping bag temperature ratings vary from one manufacturer to the next. Use these ratings as a guide only—not a guarantee.

What Else Affects My Overall Warmth?
Besides the sleeping bag itself, these factors influence your warmth and comfort:

- **Sleeping pad:** This insulates the space between your bag and the cold ground (reducing convective heat loss) and adds a layer of cushioning.

- **Tent:** Using a tent traps another layer of "dead air" around you, warming it by up to 10°F.

- **Metabolism:** Are you a "cold sleeper" who prefers extra insulation when sleeping? Or are you a "warm sleeper" who kicks off the covers at home?

- **Gender:** Women generally prefer a bit warmer bag than men, up to 8°F warmer per EN (European Norm) testing on backpacking bags.

- **Clothing:** What you wear inside the bag makes a difference. Long underwear and clean socks help insulate you while also keeping body oils off of your bag. A cap and neck gaiter help retain body heat. For colder-than-expected nights, a fleece jacket and pants can help.

- **Hood:** Sleeping bags with hoods (more commonly found on backpacking bags) can be cinched up on cold nights to help retain warmth.

- **Hydration:** Staying hydrated adds warmth. Enjoy a warm drink before bed.

Tips on Choosing Wisely
Select a bag with a temperature rating a bit lower than the lowest temperature you expect to encounter. If you're headed for near-freezing temperatures, then choose a 20°F bag instead of a 35°F bag. If temperatures remain higher than expected, you can easily vent the bag to provide more air circulation.

Here's a general rule of thumb on temperature ratings:

Bag Type	Temperature Rating (°F)
Summer Season	+35° and higher
3-Season Bag	+10° to +35°
Cold Weather	-10° to +10°
Winter/Extreme	-10° and lower

Note: Most camping bags feature a temperature rating between +15°F and +50°F.

Sleeping Bag Construction

How Do Sleeping Bags Work?
Sleeping bags keep you warm by trapping and holding a layer of "dead" (non-circulating) air next to your body. Your body heat warms this dead air, and the bag forms a barrier between it and the colder ground or outside air. The less air space there is to heat, the faster you warm up and stay warm. Camping bags are roomier than backpacking bags for greater comfort, with the tradeoff being less efficient warming of this dead space.

Sleeping Bag Insulation
Most campers choose bags with **synthetic insulation** (versus goose-down insulation) for its strong overall performance and friendly price tag. Typically made of polyester, a synthetic fill offers the following advantages:

- Quick-drying
- Insulates even if it gets wet
- Less expensive than down-filled bags
- Stands up to roughhousing kids and dogs
- Nonallergenic.

Goose-down insulation is offered in a few camping bags. It provides a more durable and compressible alternative to synthetic fill but features a slightly higher pricetag. **Water-resistant down**, such as DriDown™, is an emerging insulation option that combines goose down with a treatment that protects the down feathers from moisture.

Shell and Lining

The outer shell of a camping bag is typically made of a ripstop nylon or polyester for durability. Many synthetic-fill bags feature a shell fabric treated with a durable water repellent (DWR) finish. DWR is the stuff that allows water to bead up rather than soak through the fabric. Linings, on the other hand, promote the dispersal of body moisture, so DWR is not used here.

> **Tip:** To tell if a shell has a durable water repellent (DWR) treatment, rub a wet cloth across the surface of a bag. If the water beads up, then it has DWR.

Shape and Fit



Most camping bags are designed with a **rectangular** shape for maximum comfort and roominess. If you choose 2 bags with compatible zippers, it's easy to mate them and create a double bed. You can lay 2 bags on a queen-size air mattress for the utmost in outdoor sleeping comfort.

Optionally, **semirectangular** bags (or barrel-shaped bags) can be used for both camping and backpacking. Their tapered design offers greater warmth and efficiency than rectangular bags, but is still plenty roomy for a comfortable night's sleep. They are popular with larger- frame backpackers or restless sleepers who don't like the tight fit of a mummy bag.



Women's Sleeping Bags

These bags are specifically designed and engineered to match a woman's contours. When compared to standard bags, women-specific bags are distinguished by the following characteristics:

- Shorter and narrower at the shoulders
- Wider at the hips
- Extra insulation in the upper body
- Extra insulation in the footbox.

Kids' Sleeping Bags

When the kids get a good night's sleep, so do you. Consider these child-friendly features when shopping for kids' bags:

- Some models feature a built-in sleeve on the bottom of the bag. This holds the sleeping pad so that your child, the bag and the pad stay together all night.
- Other bags accomplish the same thing with pad loops that attach the pad and the bag.

- Pillow pockets allow a jacket or backcountry pillow to be stuffed inside to create a cozy place for kids to lay their heads.
- Exterior pockets on the bag keep young explorers' headlamps, MP3 players and campsite keepsakes in easy reach.

Sleeping Bag Features
Once you've landed on a temperature rating, insulation and shape, consider these points.

Zipper compatibility: Some bags can be zipped together to create a double bed. You can mate any 2 sleeping bags IF:

- One bag has a "right-hand" zipper and the other a "left-hand" zipper. Note: A right-hand zip means the bag opens and closes to your right when you are lying in the bag on your back.
- The zippers are the same size, style and roughly the same length.

Double-wide bags: Designed to comfortably sleep 2 people, roomy double-wide bags can be combined with an air mattress (or foam sleeping pad) for a cozy night's sleep. Most models zip apart to create 2 individual bags.

Hood: Camping in cooler temperatures? You'll lose a lot of heat through your head. Consider a semi-rectangular bag with a built-in hood. When cinched with a draw-cord, the hood prevents heat from radiating away. Some hoods offer a pillow pocket that you can stuff with clothing to create a pillow.

Stash pocket: This keeps small items, such as an MP3 player, cell-phone, watch or glasses, close at hand.

Sleeping pad sleeve: On some bags, the underside insulation has been replaced with a sleeve to fit a sleeping pad. The result: no more rolling off the sleep pad in the middle of the night!

Pillow: Most of us need one for comfortable sleep. Some bags include a "pillow pocket" which allows you to stuff your clothes inside to create a pillow. You can also purchase a camp-specific pillow or, if you have room, simply bring your own pillow from home.

Sleeping bag liner: Slip a soft sleeping bag liner inside your bag to minimize wear and keep the bag clean. Layering in a liner adds 8° to 15°F of warmth, allowing a single bag to serve you in a wider variety of temperatures. Camping in very warm weather? Skip the bag and just sleep in the liner.

Stuff sack: Many bags come with a stuff sack or others are sold separately, to easily transport your bag.

Storage
You can prolong the life of any sleeping bag by hanging it in your garage or storing it loosely in a cotton storage sack—and not rolled up tight in a stuff sack. This long-term storage prevents the insulation from getting permanently compressed, which reduces its insulating properties.