

CAMPING

BASICS



HOW TO SET UP CAMP, BUILD A FIRE,
AND ENJOY THE OUTDOORS



Johnny Molloy

Adventure Skills Guides

GET OUTDOORS AND CONNECT WITH NATURE

Adventure Skills Guides

The difference between a good camping trip and a not-so-good camping trip is having the skills that give you an edge—from pitching your tent in the correct spot or staying dry during a thunderstorm to stoking an inviting fire. Quality camping skills will help you deal with bugs, rain, and other outdoor unpleasanties.

Camping skills help you smooth out the edges, taking the rough out of roughing it. Then you can better enjoy the experience for which you came, soaking in the sunshine with friends and family, spending quality time together in the great outdoors, and enjoying a respite from the daily grind. Quality camping skills create the best outdoor event possible. This guide will teach you those skills.

JOHNNY MOLLOY

Johnny Molloy is an outdoor writer who has camped more than 4,500 nights in his lifetime and in locales ranging from Alaska to Florida. He has authored over 75 outdoor guides and continues to enjoy camping, backpacking, hiking, and paddling throughout North America. Johnny lives in Johnson City, Tennessee.

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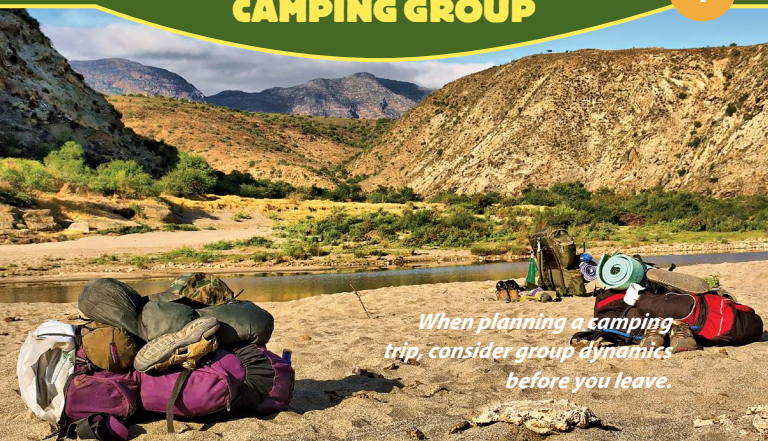
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ASSEMBLING YOUR CAMPING GROUP

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When planning a camping trip, consider group dynamics before you leave.


Group dynamics are critical. Personality conflicts can be more damaging to a camping trip than other problems, such as bad weather. When assembling a group, deliberate whether individual members will get along and cooperate. Also factor in demeanor, toughness, and political and religious outlook among other traits.

Next assess group size and trip expectations. The more people, the more complicated things become. Once the camping party is assembled, review trip practicalities such as exactly where, when, and for how long you are camping. Also review gear, especially gear that is shared by the group.

Arrive at a consensus about the length and style of the trip. Does everyone want to hike, bike, and paddle all day long and spend little time at camp? Or do they want to spend more time relaxing by the fire? Families often make a good group because they know each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, camping newbies can be another story. If taking a newbie camping, plan the trip with them in mind. Consider their physical abilities and inexperience when choosing where to camp and what to do—after all you want them to like it. Factor in weather. A first-timer is not going to enjoy spending the whole day getting soaked. Pick a good weather window.

Don't intimidate. Initiating your friend is not an opportunity to show what a great camper you are—that you can set up a tent in three minutes—it's about the new camper and their experience.

No matter your group composition, make it clear up front about sharing expenses, chores, and other duties. This way there will be no unpleasant surprises when it comes time to collect money—or firewood. After all parties come to agreement about the adventure, review the details one last time, then you're ready to go!



The first step is to establish what kind of camping you want to do, and where: in the backcountry, in the comfort of a yurt or a camper cabin, or car camping.

First decide what type of camping you want to do. Do you want to camp in the frontcountry, places accessible by vehicle? Or do you want to head to the backcountry, usually accessible by foot, but also by canoe, kayak, or bicycle? Most of us will be frontcountry camping, or car camping as it is known. First, seek out state and national parks as well as state and national forests if adding nature-based activities such as hiking, paddling, and nature study to your camping agenda. These parks preserve special scenic and natural areas, and often include campgrounds, allowing you to pitch your tent amid nature's splendor and enjoy nature-based activities near the campground.



Seek private campgrounds when location is important (if you want to camp near a theme park or concert site, for example.) Fees will generally be higher at private campgrounds, and they often are geared more toward RV campers than tent campers. Select a private campground if you want increased amenities such as on-site laundry, game rooms, and more luxurious bathhouses.

Ramp up your camping game by renting a yurt or camper cabin, often including decks and furniture. Yurts are a combination of cabin on the bottom and fabric on top, often circular, but with other variants. Your chosen state park or private campground may offer yurts or camper cabins for rental. They're unusual, fun, and associated with "glamping," aka glamorous camping.

Choose backcountry camping if you like to keep it simple. Most back-packing camps are a designated spot with a fire ring, occasionally with a picnic table and outhouse. Other backcountry campsites, such as those in national forests, are just traditionally camped-upon flat spots, not official designated campsites, usually with water access. Backcountry campers should bring everything they need. Reservations can be made for backcountry sites at some state and national parks.

Be sure to make reservations in advance when car camping, especially on busy holiday weekends. Many online reservation platforms show photos of each campsite, though the pictures are not always helpful, given the lack of perspective. If you arrive at the campground and your site is unfavorable, ask to switch—it can't hurt. Once at a favored camping destination, peruse the campground and take note of your favorite campsites. That way in the future you can reserve the site that best suits you.



TENT CAMPING CHECKLIST

Tents, Sleeping Bags, Pads, and Pillows

Tent with rain fly
Tent groundsheet/
footprint
Adequate sleeping
bags
Sleeping pads
Air mattress/
electric pump
Camp pillows

Cooking and Food Storage

Cooler
Water container
Water filter
Pots/frying pans
Grill
Stove
Stove fuel
Cups
Knives/forks/spoons
Spatula/long spoon/
other utensils
Scrub brush/
dish soap
Spices/sugar/syrup
Cooking oil
Multiple lighters
Firestarter
Can opener
Corkscrew
Foil
Paper towels/napkins

Other Gear

Camp chairs
Headlamp/
flashlight/lantern

Spare batteries/
battery charger
Rope

Clothing

Long-sleeve shirts
Short-sleeve shirts
T-shirts
Long pants
Short pants
Socks
Bathing suit
Bandana
Ball cap/sun hat/
rain hat
Down jacket
Rain jacket/pants
Sandals
Hiking shoes/boots
Water shoes

Personal

Phone/charger/
cord/plug/
waterproof case
Solar charger
Toothbrush/
toothpaste/floss
First aid kit/
Band-Aids/
Benadryl cream
Pain reliever
Insect repellent
Sunscreen/lip balm
Bath soap/
washcloth/towel
Lotion
Toilet paper/
hand wipes
Sunglasses with
neck strap
Water bottle

Other Helpful Gear

Weather radio
Maps as needed
Fishing rod/
reel/tackle
Hiking poles
Canoe/kayak/
paddles/life vests
Books

Camping with Kids

Kid specific
clothing/gear
Games/toys

Camping with your Dog

Dog food/treats
Leash
Dog toys/towel
Dog bed/pen

After Your Camping Trip

Air out tent
Air out sleeping bags
Unroll pads/
mattresses
Wash camp dishes/
pots/utensils
Empty backpacks/
daypacks
Hang coats/jackets
to dry
Store gear after
drying

HOW TO BUILD A FIRE

First, gather together all wood and fire-starter supplies before you start building the fire. Time is of the essence when starting a fire.

Bring fire-starter material with you—candles, preformed fire-starter sticks, purchased kindling, dry paper, and lighter fluid. In the backcountry cut down weight by bringing only candle stubs and small starter sticks.

Next, gather firewood—always dry deadwood if possible. (Don't collect firewood in a park if forbidden and never transport firewood due to the possibility of spreading invasive insects.) Look under overhanging limbs and logs for dry wood. Collect small dead branches, from tiny twigs to ones with a diameter of your pinky finger, then gather deadwood the size of your forearm or smaller. Gather enough wood for the night—and the next morning—if possible. More wood is required in winter with colder temperatures and longer nights.



DIVIDE FIREWOOD INTO THREE STACKS:

1. tiny branches
2. smaller finger-size branches
3. forearm-size wood



Lay a layer of burnable wood atop the ground/fire ring, then build the fire on that. Fires ignite much better on a layer of burnable wood or old coals than on wet leaves or saturated soil. Crumple paper and set on wood

layer, sprinkle broken fire-starter sticks onto the paper, then carefully lay tiny twigs horizontally onto paper in a crosshatch pattern and also vertically, giving the fire something to climb.



Carefully and slowly add twigs and small finger-size wood. Don't smother the fire. Allow room for oxygen to reach the flames. Be patient. Carefully and selectively blow or fan fire if necessary, aiming toward the

base of the fire so the flames can ignite wood stacked upon it. Continue adding small finger-size branches both vertically and horizontally until fire is robust. You may need to repeat blowing or fanning. As the fire gains strength add forearm-size pieces of wood.

Continue adding smaller sticks to the bottom of the fire to maintain a strong base. Monitor the fire frequently, adding wood as necessary.



PUTTING OUT YOUR FIRE

First, allow the fire to wane, then pull away bigger pieces of the fire with a stick, letting them die out. Spread out remaining coals and let them die down.

Next, pour water onto the fire, simultaneously stirring the coals with a stick until the fire is completely extinguished and cool to the touch. If no water is available smother the fire with soil and rocks as a last resort.

STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



JOHNNY'S TOP 10 PIECES OF CAMPING ADVICE

1. **Have fun.** Learning to camp can be a fun, rewarding time of shared activity. Laugh off your mistakes and those of others. Make camping an adventure to be shared, an outdoor vacation.
2. **Plan activities while camping**—hiking, swimming, fishing, and reading. Also, build in some plain ol' relaxation time.
3. **Don't be afraid to ask** your camping neighbors for help. It may take two people to get a fire going, or your neighbor might have some item you need. While cooperating you might make a new friend.
4. **Bring tasty foods to eat.** Surprise your fellow campers with their favorite treats. Write down a meal plan, then purchase all the items needed before leaving home. Remember not only meals, but also snacks, desserts, and drinks.
5. **Bring proper clothing** to cover your body from sun, heat, wind, rain, and cold. Sunburned campers will not be happy, neither will cold campers nor bug-bitten campers.
6. **Bring adequate light for nighttime**—a lantern to brighten the night, flashlights, too. Headlamps offer hands-free lighting. Stringed lights lend a festive atmosphere.
7. **Bring reading material.** Review your favorite blog or finally get to that book. Field guides are also a great way to explore the area around you. Pull up a chair and remember your glasses if needed.
8. **Document memories.** Take photographs and shoot video. You might not like that picture of you with mustard on your chin, but it sure will be funny down the line. Camping videos of children can be hilarious.
9. **Attend to your bedding.** No matter your age, an air mattress makes the nights shorter. Infrequent campers often toss and turn in the tent. Bring adequately warm sleeping bags and blankets, plus a pillow. A long night in the tent becomes a lot longer if you are chilled to the bone.
10. **Most importantly,** be ready to roll with the punches. There's going to be a little rain eventually; be prepared for it.

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Enjoy the Beauty, Solitude, and Oneness with Nature

Get started camping or improve your skills with tips and simple instructions

Easy-to-follow booklet with concise, straightforward information for beginner and novice tent campers

- Introduction to the basics of setting up camp and building a fire
- Expert tips on planning, packing, and dealing with bugs and bad weather
- Top 10 pieces of camping advice
- Checklist of must-have items to bring
- Author with over 4,500 nights of camping experience

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