

Fieldcraft Equipment

The Essential Kit



Being Prepared for any situation in the outdoors is not only a necessity, but the responsibility of anyone who spends time in the outdoors. To help in being prepared, this list details The Outdoor Essential Kit. Most of these items have multiple outdoor applications, and all are evaluated using the "Utility To Weight Ratio©" as a method of determining their value in the outdoors.



□ *A First Aid Kit*

A basic First Aid Kit should match the knowledge, level of training, and skill of the user. A kit should be updated and modified as the individual increases in knowledge and skill.

Carrying a First Aid Kit allows for the treatment of minor injuries while in the outdoors which can prevent the risk of serious infection or complications of injuries, but a kit is not a substitute for First Aid knowledge and skill. Continuing to learn new skills and practice is essential to being able to provide first aid while in the outdoors.

A basic First Aid Kit should contain items that allow for the treatment of cuts and minor lacerations; moderate bleeding; burns, blisters, minor insect bites; minor sprains, strains, and breaks; and contain only over-the-counter medications to treat minor pain and inflammation, mild digestive issues, and minor allergic reactions. Never treat an injury or issue that is beyond your level of training and never give medications to a person who cannot clearly inform you of their allergies and basic medical history

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□ *A Cutting Tool and Basic Outdoor Tool Kit*

A high quality dependable knife is a primary tool, and an absolute must have piece of equipment in the outdoors. As a primary tool, a knife provides the ability to make or craft other tools that can be used in the outdoors and especially in a survival situation. A Swiss Army Knife or multitool will allow for greater options than a single blade knife alone; however a practical fixed blade knife provides utility beyond a pocket knife or folding knife alone.

When carried in combination, a quality fixed blade knife and a Swiss Army Knife or multitool like the *Leatherman Wave* provide the ability to not only craft tools in the outdoors, but also build shelters, start fires, and repair equipment when necessary.

A folding or pack saw increases the abilities to craft items in the outdoors. Many Swiss Army knives and multitool models offer a small saw. There are also many models of folding pack saws currently available. As is the case with any tool, the skill to safely use the tool is the most important factor in using it successfully. Practice and skill development are as important as the tool itself.

□ *A Fire Kit*

The ability to make a fire in the outdoors can be a lifesaving skill. The heat from a fire can prevent hypothermia, can dry wet clothing and gear, can be used to disinfect water, and signal for rescue. Having a fire kit that provides multiple methods of starting a fire is as essential as the ability and skill to use the contents of the kit. Matches alone only provide for one method of fire starting. A well prepared Fire Kit should contain at minimum of three different methods of starting a fire, and the user must be skilled in each of those methods. A basic Fire Kit should also contain materials to assemble a tinder bundle as a means of starting a "first fire".

□ *A Water Disinfecting Kit and Container*

Water is essential to life, and the lack of water leads to dehydration, hyperthermia, and even worse. A person can only survive a few days without water, and can begin to feel the effects of dehydration in a few hours. Being active in the outdoors makes the intake of water even more important to prevent dehydration. A water container should be full before setting out on an outing, and should also provide the ability to disinfect water as needed.

A Water Disinfection kit will allow you to filter and disinfect water from available sources, and should include purification tablets or a method of chemically treating water. It should also contain field expedient water filtering equipment and commercial water filter/disinfecting equipment, and at least one container capable of disinfecting by boiling. A single walled stainless steel bottle is best for this application.

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□ *A Poncho*

Rain gear is an important part of any outdoor kit, and a poncho provides capabilities beyond simple rain gear. Getting wet in the outdoors can lead to hypothermia, which presents a real threat to survival. A poncho allows the ability to cover your body as well as your pack, which will prevent your gear from becoming wet. In addition to serving as a simple piece of rain gear, a poncho provides greater capabilities in the outdoors and in a survival situation. A poncho also provides a means of constructing a quick shelter when necessary, and can be used in conjunction with a fleece blanket as a sleeping cover when needed. A poncho is very high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

□ *Cordage*

Carrying cordage of some form should be included in the Outdoor Essentials Kit, since it is one of the most important resources that you will need in the outdoors. It can be used to craft shelters, equipment or even obtain food. There are many choices, however; experienced hikers and campers usually choose parachute cord or paracord. Real military grade paracord is constructed of 7 inner cords and encased in a woven nylon casing. The breaking strength is rated at approximately 550 pounds, which is why it is also known as 550 cord. There are other commercial versions available with loose nylon inner fibers which are not nearly as versatile as real 550 cord.

Another choice of cordage would be tarred mariner's line or "bank line". Known as bank line because it is used in fishing from the banks of a stream or river, this nylon cord is coated with a black tar which results in the cordage becoming virtually weather-proof. It comes in many sizes, with #36 being one of the most popular, which can be separated into three strands of #12 line increasing the uses. It is available on a spool sold by weight or length.

Cordage is essential when venturing to the outdoors, and is very high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

□ *Spare Clothes*

At a very minimum extra socks and an additional insulating layer of clothing should always be carried when in the outdoors. It is important to match your clothing to the weather or predicted weather conditions. If hiking any distance, it is always a good idea to carry two pairs of socks to provide protection for your feet, and an extra shirt to change when you stop. When choosing the additional clothing to carry, keep in mind the insulating value of wool and synthetic fleece material when damp or wet.

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□ *Sun and Environmental Protection*

Protection from the environment takes many forms, but one of the best methods of protecting your ears, nose, and face from sunburn is to wear a wide brim hat. There are many options, even some that are water repellent.

It is also a good idea to carry and wear eye protection. It can be in the form of sun glasses or even dedicated protective eye wear. It can protect your eyes from injuries while in the outdoors, and prevent irritation from exposure to strong sunlight.

Sun block may be useful in some cases, but lip balm is an important item to include. Uses for lip balm beyond the intended purpose of protecting the skin on the lips include being used in starting and sustaining a fire, making it high on the "Utility to Weight Ratio©" scale.

Some form of non-aerosol insect repellent is also smart to carry since insect bites and stings can have an impact on any outing, and in some cases even spread disease. There are many types and brands currently available, so research your choices to insure that what you choose provides the protection that you need. Gloves are also an essential item to carry in the outdoors, and not only for keeping hands warm. Heavy duty work gloves can protect your hands while completing many tasks in the outdoors and can protect your hands from blisters, burns, and other minor injuries. Medium or heavy duty leather or synthetic material gloves will provide protection, and when combined with a light weight glove liner, will also provide thermal protection.

□ *A Navigation Kit*

A GPS can run out of battery power. A mobile telephone can lose or not obtain a signal. These are not reliable methods of navigation in the outdoors. There is no substitute for a quality compass, an accurate map, and the skill to use them together to navigate in the outdoors. Land navigation skills also require regular practice to develop proficiency and confidence when needed. A basic Nav Kit should contain a quality dependable compass, maps of the area in which you are traveling or hiking; a notebook with pencil, a map scale or map protractor, and pace count beads.

Additional tools and skills can be useful in the outdoors, but the practicing and mastering the basic skills of using a map and compass together can be the difference between a fun outdoor day hike or an night of inconvenient camping.

□ *A Flashlight or Headlamp (with spare batteries)*

In addition to allowing you to see at night, a flashlight or headlamp can also serve as a method signaling if lost. A lighting tool can allow for reading a map in low light and the inspection of an injury.

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A head lamp has the added advantage of allowing both hands to be free to complete tasks. Many compact flashlights also have accessory head straps or clips that allow them to be attached to clothing, hats, or equipment allowing for hands free use. Spare batteries provide a back-up that extends the use of your light, but may not be an option with rechargeable lights.

❑ *Food*

On any outing, it is always a good idea to carry a snack to provide a means of replenishing energy during times of high activity. A good snack should provide a balance of nutrients and calories, and be easy to carry and eat while in the outdoors with a minimum of preparation.

As a back-up, it is always a good idea to have an extra meal packed just in case your outing becomes an overnight of inconvenient camping. Preparation of this should not require heat or cooking, since this may not be an option in some conditions.

❑ *Lightweight Tarp or Heavy Duty Emergency Blanket*

In addition to a poncho, a lightweight tarp or an emergency blanket can be used to construct a shelter if trapped in a sudden storm, to provide shade, in a situation of inconvenient camping and even for treating an injured person for the symptoms of shock.

There are many brands or particular models of tarps or emergency blankets available commercially in many sizes, but one measuring approximately 6 feet by 8 feet will serve well for any application. It has many possible uses, it will fold small, packs almost flat, and is very high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

❑ *Contractor Bags*

Heavy duty contractor trash bags weigh very little, and have many possible uses in the outdoors. They can be used to construct a shelter, assemble a browse bed, provide a waterproof cover, even serve as a casualty blanket to treat the effects of shock after an injury. Just be certain to carry bags that are at least 4 mil thickness or greater. One or two bags fold very flat and compact, and are high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

❑ *Heavy Duty Tape*

Duct tape or "Gorilla Tape" weighs very little, and takes up very little space; however in the outdoors, it's uses are almost endless. It can be used to repair fabric on gear or clothing; it can be used to construct shelter, and even start a fire. It is waterproof, and inexpensive and is very high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

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□ *Bandana or Shemagh*

A large cotton bandana or shemagh is useful not only as a scarf, but also as a head cover, a face cover, and has many applications in providing first aid. It can also be used as a primary filter when gathering water. It can also be useful as a face and head cover when sleeping to keep small flying insects away from your face and head. Soaked in cool water, and wrung out it can be used to cool the head and neck and prevent overheating.

They come in many colors and designs, just be sure to find one that is 100% cotton, so that it may be used to make char cloth if necessary.

A bandana or shemagh is light weight, packs small, and is high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

□ *Field Repair or "Fix-It" Kit*

A small repair kit containing a few needles, thread, and buttons can provide a means of repairing clothing while in the outdoors. Sewing needles can also be used to remove splinters once sterilized using alcohol or flame. A small sewing or repair kit is lightweight, and easy to carry, and the ability to repair clothing in the outdoors cannot be emphasized enough.

Nylon "zip ties" come in various sizes and can be used to repair gear, construct a shelter, craft snares or traps, and have more uses than imaginable. They weigh almost nothing, and are very inexpensive.

Thin wire such as floral wire should be considered in a "Fix-It" Kit due to the number of uses in the field to repair gear, craft snares or traps, even fashion fish hooks. Thin lightweight wire is light weight, easy to carry, and inexpensive.

Rubber bands of various sizes should also be part of a "Fix-It" Kit due to the number of uses in the field. These items should be included in a small kit that will give you the ability to keep your gear working and in good repair while out in the field. A repair kit is high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

□ *Field Notebook and Writing Tools*

Whether recording thoughts while in the outdoors, making notes about a location to which you would like to return, or writing down land navigation data, a good outdoor notebook and pencil or pen are essential.

While every Scout should always have in their possession "something to write with and something to write on"; it is always smart to have a dedicated Field Notebook with the writing tools of your choice in your pack in a waterproof bag of some type. You should include both a pencil and a pen with your field notebook. It is lightweight, takes up very little space and is high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.

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Kit Extras

Two of the most overlooked items when assembling an Outdoor Essentials Kit are *zipper-lock type bags* and *aluminum foil*.

Quart size bags can be used to obtain water, forage tinder materials; gather wild edibles; and even melt snow to collect water. Zipper lock type bags can also be used to waterproof other items in your kit. Aluminum foil can be used to heat water, food, and even signal for rescue. It can be used to form drinking vessels, and as a ground protection when starting a fire. Both zipper lock bags and aluminum foil have are very high on the "*Utility to Weight Ratio*®" scale.