

Car Camping

With car camping, you don't need to worry about how much your equipment weighs. This is important because lighter equipment tends to be more expensive. You can bring as much stuff with you as your car can hold...and then some probably. You pack a cooler of food, wood for the fire, charcoal or propane for grilling, maybe an air mattress or cot. In addition to your tent, you might set up a hammock and holding chair.

Primitive Camping

With backpacking, everything comes down to how much does it weigh. First, you lay out everything you want to have on your trip. Then you see if it fits into your pack. If it fits into your pack, you get on the scale and see if the weight is something you are able and willing to carry. From there, you start to pare down. Do I really need this battery pack? Am I going to read once I set up camp? Every decision becomes is the weight worth carrying.

The integrity of your tent is dependent on you setting it up properly. Each tent has different number of poles, are different shapes or sizes but they all have a few things in common.

First, always check the tent bag to ensure the tent poles and stakes are in there. I have now been on two camping trips without stakes. While you are sleeping it's not as big of deal (in most places) but have you ever tried to leave your tent without stakes on a windy beach?

- **Put the poles in first.** This allows a couple of things: 1) You can position the tent exactly where you want it after checking for hills, rocks and bugs. 2) You can stretch the tent to exactly you need. When you stake the tent first, sometimes you can't get to poles in because you stretched the edges out too far. Then you must start over.
- **Put a footprint or tarp under the tent.** The footprint serve multiple purposes. 1) it is an extra layer of protection for the bottom of your tent. 2) it helps keep moisture off the bottom of your tent. 3) it block heat/cold from the ground.
- **Keep the screen doors and winds closed.** If you need to air out your tent, it's best to keep the screen parts closed. 1) bugs will go into your tent with the screens open. 2) if it rains, the inside of the tent has no protection. You can still air out the tent with the screens open. If you know for sure it will not rain, you can take rain fly off during the day to help keep the tent cooler.
- **Know when you need the rain fly.** If I know it is possible, I like to sleep without the rain fly. When you roll over, it's nice to get a glimpse of the stars and moon. If there is any chance of rain, I'll put it on. Otherwise, every little noise will wake me up.
- **Bring a plastic mallet to hammer** in the stakes or find a rock near your site. Plastics stakes work better than medal in stand. Bring extra stakes. Sometimes the ground is really hard and you bend or break the stake to the point that you can't use it.

- **Carry some duct tape.** If a pole breaks or you find a leak, you can do a quick repair with some duct tape.
- **Don't synch them down too tightly.** Your tent is meant to be flexible in the wind. If the tent is synched down and you get a lot of wind, the poles may bend or break under the tension.
- If your pole breaks, don't worry your tent is not garbage. You can have new poles made for your tent, cheap.
- **Packing up your tent.** Getting your tent to fit back in the original bag is not as easy as it sounds. Most bags are made to fit the tent perfectly. Try to remember to take note about how it was folded when you first set up the tent. After that, it becomes a little trial and error. Lay out the tent and fold it. Before you roll it up, place the bag on the tent to see if you have folded it enough or too much. If your folds are smaller than the bag, likely your tent will be too fat to fit in the bag after you roll it.

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Do you want fire or do you want heat?

Fire needs air. With oxygen, the fire will grow. Without it, it will smother and die. Seems pretty simple, right? One would think, but still, many camp fires seem to just go out without a reason. I am not the best camp fire builder but I can *usually* keep a flame with little smoke. (I love bunnies, I love bunnies. Keep reading to find out what this means. ☺)

Knowing a few basic things can change the size and duration of your fire.

Items you will need:

Kindle: You may have heard of the Kindle Fire from Amazon, but kindle is actually the first thing you need to start building your fire. Kindle is the 'quick burn' of your fire. It can be made up of small sticks, pine cones (pine cones are highly flammable when dry, use extreme caution...the pop too!), straw, leaves, paper ... basically anything that catches on fire quickly.

Paper or Firestarter: While kindle catches and burns quickly, it's hard to put a match to a twig and get to catch on fire. Balling up a couple of pieces of paper, paper towels or using a Firestarter stick is the best. I don't like to use lighter fluid especially if I'm going to cook on the fire. If you are dutch oven cooking, keep the paper towels you used to grease your dutch oven. They will get charcoal or camp fires going in seconds.

Small Logs: A fire is made up of layers. The kindle will burn out quickly. While it's burning, you need something else that the fire is working to catch on to. If the log is too big, the kindle won't be enough to start the fire. Therefore, you need some logs that are bigger than kindle and smaller than the main camp fire log.

Large Logs: The large logs will be the duration of your fire. They take the longest to catch fire, but they hold the fire the longest as well. A large log is about a foot long and maybe 6 inches thick. The larger the logs, the larger the fire. But remember, the

larger the log you put on the fire, the bigger base you need to ensure it catch on fire and doesn't smother your fire.

Lighter/Matches: Once you've build the perfect base, you need something to light it with. If you build your fire with the Firestarter material in the middle, a lighter stick works the best. If you built the base where the fire starter piece are placed in, matches can work.

Ax: Some parks let you collect wood and kindle from the camp site and others do not. Check with the ranger station first. You are never allowed to cut from live trees. Either way, an ax is good to have. Either to break up large branches collected around your site or to create kindle from larger logs you brought in.

Poker Stick: Maybe the most valuable thing you need for a camp fire after the matches. The poker stick help you manipulate the hot logs once they are on the camp fire and add new logs. When you need to elevate a log to get some air underneath it, you use a poker stick. Don't worry, you don't have to buy one! As you are collecting your fire wood, keep an eye out for the perfect poker stick. My favorites are medium sticks with a curve. If the top 'forks' a little, that could be helpful. I look for one that fits well in my handle and is smooth to the touch. It will be used a lot throughout the night. Keep sure everyone knows it's the poker stick so it doesn't end up in the fire.

Be careful not to pick up the wrong end of the poker stick...it will be hot!

How to assemble the camp fire:

Clear out the camp fire ring of any wet leaves or debris you don't want to burn. In the middle of the ring, place your Firestarter pieces. Using your Kindle, create a tepee around the Firestarter pieces; leaving some room for the lighter stick and air to enter. Start with the smallest stickers and slowly increase the size, keeping the tepee shape & spaces to allow airflow. You should be able to see our Firestarter pieces.

I add small and medium size logs in the tepee form. I put the ends that are more narrow on the top of the tepee or if a log has split in it, I try to put the split towards the top. Splits in wood allow the air to flow through it and helps larger logs of wood catch of fire quicker.

Once you have the Firestarter, kindle, small logs, medium logs in place, light the Firestarter pieces. By the time the Firestarter pieces burn out, the small kindle should catch fire. If it looks like it is not going to catch, light another piece of first starter and use your poker stick to try to get it close to something that will catch quickly.

Once the kindle catches, the smaller logs will start to catch. And then the medium logs. You will want to add a larger log after a few coals have formed but before your base fire goes away. If you add the larger log too soon, it might smother the fire you have. If you add it too late, it might not catch.

Some people can build initial tepees to include larger logs. I tend to build is slowly.

Each time you add a new piece of wood to the fire, you want to keep the tepee shape as much as possible if you want fire. The tepee shape keeps air flowing throughout the fire. If you lay a log on hot coals, it will soon become hot coals without as much flame.

I love bunnies: The first time I went camping, I was told if the smoke was blowing in your face you are supposed to say, "I love bunnies" and the smoke will change direction. I have seen it happen and I figure it can't hurt anything so might as well try. Either that or get your poker stick and the wet wood off your fire. 😊

Putting out the fire: Never leave a fire unattended...even if you are going to be sleeping in the tent right next to it. To put out your fire, spread out the coals. Mix the coals together with the dirt. Then you can pour some water on top.

You can also bunch the coals together. If the coals aren't getting air, they should go out. With this method, you can cool off the top layer. In the morning, when you spread out the coals, you should be able to start the fire quickly. Be careful with this method as not all of your coals are truly out before you go to bed.

Trouble Shooting:

Have you ever noticed when you go to put out a fire, it's the hottest it's been all night? The coals hold in the heat, especially when they are packed together. To spread the heat, spread the coals. Be careful doing so.

Depending on how many coals you have and how long you want the fire to last, spreading the coals might put out the fire. If dirt is mixed in with the coals, the coals will lose heat faster.

Red Coals but no Flames: Red coals can put off a lot of heat! When you are camping, heat is nice... the flames just really bring everything together. Especially, if you want to make smores. If there is a decent size log on the red coals and no flame, the fire needs air. Try lifting part of the log off of the coals. Once it is set, blow on the coals, wait a second, and fire should start.

If there is not log and just red coals, add a log. For a fire, it's best to add 2 logs so you can create a tepee or allow air to get in. If you lay one log on the hot coal, it will soon too be just hot coals.

Flames go out quickly; little to no red coals: Jumping too quickly in the size of the logs. The kindle used is not enough to ignite the log. Replace the log with a smaller log or add larger kindle. Progressively increase the size of the kindle to logs. Large jumps will put the fire out.

Smokey: Most likely, something is wet. The leaves or sticks for the kindle or the logs. Wet wood is the worst thing for a camp fire. It might start to catch but it never fully is part of the fire. Usually it just smokes and makes for a lot of poking at the fire. If you think a log is wet, take it off the fire. You can keep it near the fire to try to dry it out for another day.

With SUVs, campers, 6 room tents, many people bring their entire house outdoors. Don't get me wrong, I way over pack when I car camp. There are things that just make it more enjoyable. I think where I draw the line is the radio.

When I'm outdoors, I want to hear the outdoors. I want to hear peace & quiet, animals, and water flowing. Not one camp site deciding to fill the entire camping ground with their music. The thing about a camp ground is everyone can hear the smallest noise. So, while you might have your radio on low volume, everyone in the campground is now required to listen your music. There is no escape. And when the sun sets at 5:45pm, it's a long time to the 10pm quiet hours.

For the most part, I haven't had too many problems with my sites. Maybe it's luck or maybe I learned what to look for over the years. Just in case it's not luck, I'm going to share with you a few things I look for when I go camping to get more of that outdoor feeling.

Most camp grounds typically have various amenities available. Such as Full RV hook ups, electric outlets, running water, towels (full bathrooms to composting.)

As my general rule, the more amenities a site has, the more people, kids and party groups you are going find. Well, party groups you find just about anywhere, but in general, the more amenities, the more people.

Back to the question about why do people camp when they bring their whole house. You are still in nature. It's hard to be mad when you are submerged in the outdoors. Sure, I would prefer you turn off the radio. But sitting outside, next to a fire, with the cricket and stars shining above you, gives you a certain ease and comfort that is hard to find in busy cities...even if you live in a suburb.

Full Hook Ups, including sewer

Most these sites will have RVs so at night, you might hear the hum of their generators, air conditioners/heats, and possibly TVs. RVs also have more room to pack things.

Radios, electric scooters, kids, animals. I saw a guys with a cage of cats outside next to his RV today! Obviously, if you are camping with an RV, you'll want one of these spots. They are the most expensive camping sites.

Electric and Water Experience

When a site has electricity, I would expect about half the sites, if not more, to have an RV. Now there are a few caveats here. If the campground has a large number of sites will full hook ups, sometimes the electric & water sites are more for tent camping. For electricity, typically each site has a power post near the parking spot with 1 to 2 outlets. Oh yeah...I just remember the sound of the pump for the air mattress. I have been this person. Just remember, if you bring an air mattress, fill it before the sun goes down.

Water Only

You might see a pop-up camper here and there, but typically these sites will be tents only. An exception would be if the entire campground is water only. Water only & primitive sites are typically the cheapest. Prices depend on the park.

Primitive Sites

No RVs! Probably very little people because the camp site is not usually in eye sight of your car. That means, anything you want to camp with, you must carry to the site. Every primitive site is a different distance from the parking lot/trail head. Be sure to check how far the site is before you reserve it to ensure you can get all of your stuff there!

Primitive sites are less likely to have kids or large groups of people as well. Also, primitive sites tend to have distance between the sites. Meaning, you likely will not be able to see the camp site next to you.

When to expect kids

Holidays. Any weekend where schools are out the Monday or Friday, the campgrounds will have a lot of kids. And possibly boy scout troops...multiple troops. The holidays are big weekends for the parks. While it would be great to use my day off for camping, I typically try to avoid the holiday weekends. In addition, if you want a campsite during a holiday weekend, you need to reserve it well in advance. Don't forget President's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Easter. Remember to check the school & bank holidays, even if you don't have kids. Their schedule of holidays might be different than your work.

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