

10 Must-Know Brazilian Hacks for Everyday Survival

In less developed nations, people don't make as much money as in the "so-called" developed nations. This gives certain folks from these nations excellent survival problem solving skills because money tends to stunt survival problem solving skills because it encourages us to reach for our wallets instead of our toolboxes.

Because solving their problems with money is not an option for many in developing nations, their problem-solving skills develop normally. My wife is such a person. She grew up in Northeast Brazil in the state of Paraíba.

She couldn't count on the electricity staying on or water to come out of the faucet every time she turned it. The family home is simple, lacking glass windows, air conditioning and hot water. Meals are cooked on a gas stove, supplied by a cylinder. In many respects, daily life is much like camping in the US, only it is permanent.

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I enjoy observing Brazilian survival hacks and will share a few with you.

1. Fireworks for Communication

Brazilian survival hacks are cheap and effective. In some neighborhoods, specific types of fireworks are used for communication, alerting the community when the local drug trafficker has received his shipment or when police have entered the neighborhood. This gives people a chance to get behind hard cover in case bullets start flying.

Liberals might be surprised to learn that criminals have no problem finding firearms and ammunition in a country with such strict gun control laws. Such laws only deprive the law abiding of their right to self-defense. Murderers don't care if they are breaking one more law. Only law-abiding citizens care about that.

2. Cover Your Face with a T-shirt

There isn't a lot of snow in Brazil, so ski masks are uncommon. So, when a Brazilian does something he's not proud of, he improvises a balaclava from a t-shirt. This is a survival skill every survivalist should learn, both to keep warm and as a method to hide your face from cameras.

Larger T-shirts work best. The T-shirt can be either long or short sleeved. I say "T-shirt", but a long-sleeved polypropylene or merino wool blend base layer works just as well and provides more warmth in cold weather. You don't have to cut the t-shirt and tying the head covering can be accomplished in seconds.

T-shirt Balaclava:

- **Step 1** – Put the T-shirt on normally but stop when the collar hits the bridge of your nose.
- **Step 2** – Bring the tail of the T-shirt up over your head and pull it tight around your forehead, covering your

eyebrows. (Pro tip missed by Bryan Kohberger.)

- **Step 3** – Pull the sleeves tight behind your head and tie them in an overhand knot. As T-shirts are typically somewhat elastic, an overhand knot is usually all that is necessary, but a square knot will ensure that it will not come undone if you have enough fabric to work with.

I like this hack because a base layer has more uses than a balaclava and T-shirts are cheap and easily procured in urban environments.

3. Oil Lamp

The oil lamp has been used for light and heat for a very long time, with the oldest known examples dating to at least 12,000-15,000 years ago. In its simplest form, an oil lamp is a glob of oil or fat on a curved stone or pottery fragment to form a shallow dish and a wick.

Today, the electric light from LEDs is much safer and brighter than using oil lamps, but batteries and LEDs cost money. If you need to make light without spending any money, the oil lamp has been getting the job done for millennia.

In Brazil, simple oil lamps were made by sticking a wick holder and wick in a can such as a butter tin. A slightly fancier, and safer, lamp was made by sealing the mouth of a zinc coated funnel and inserting a wick holder in the narrow end, making a very stable oil lamp that was difficult to overturn.

In an urban environment, a simple oil lamp can be improvised from a metal can. For the wick, cotton is the most effective material when available. A strand from a cotton mophead makes a very effective wick. A mophead procured from a dollar store, secondhand store or a janitorial closet will provide dozens of wicks at a bargain price.

4. Water Storage in the Shower

When I first began traveling to Brazil, we could not depend on the water to flow from the faucet on demand. This problem was solved by buying a new plastic trash can, washing it, placing it in the shower, and filling it with water. A large plastic cup was dipped in the water and poured over the body to get wet, soap was lathered, and cups of water were used to rinse. If it leaks, it's already in the shower so the water will go down the drain.

The solution was practical, inexpensive and low-tech, but adequate to meet the family's immediate need. Most problems were solved in similar fashion. Nothing fancy and just enough work was performed to solve the problem.

5. Dry Clothing on the Back of the Refrigerator on Cloudy Days

The washing machine is a luxury that is taken for granted by anyone who has never washed a load of laundry without one. When my grandmother received her first washing machine in the 1940's, she wrote that she, "felt like a woman of leisure." My wife's family did not own a washing machine until the 2000's. Her father, a diesel mechanic, sat talking to the washing machine, caressing it, and telling it what a good machine it was.

Today, they own a washing machine, but they still hang laundry out to dry. On rainy days, which are not uncommon, laundry must be dried indoors, which is a slow process in the humid climate, which often exceeds 80%. On such days, the refrigerator is pulled out from the wall, the coils on the back of the refrigerator are cleaned, and the most important articles of clothing are hung on them, where they are dried by the heat that they generate.

6. Use a Shopping Cart as a Grill

A metal shopping cart can serve as a grill when turned on its side and laid on the ground. A fire is built in the basket, and food can then be cooked directly on the metal wire or in pans placed on them.

7. Terra Cotta Water Filter

In the USA, I had always seen survivalists use plastic or shiny stainless-steel Berkey-style gravity filters. They look nice and very hygienic and appeal to the US market. In Brazil, we use terra cotta gravity filters. The main benefit is that water is drawn into the terra cotta body of the filter where it evaporates, cooling the water noticeably. This is no minor detail because cool water is always so much more refreshing than warm water. When we want cold water to drink, we put it in the refrigerator.

It reminded me of terra cotta strawberry planter pots that I used when I lived in Arizona. They had many tiers of little balconies to grow the strawberries in, and when the strawberries are watered, the same evaporative cooling effect that was so noticeable in the terra cotta gravity filter takes place, cooling the delicate strawberry plants, enabling them to be grown at lower altitudes than they are found in nature.

The process of making terra cotta is about as low tech as it gets in pottery making. Terra cotta should not be overlooked as a technology to slow the spoilage of food in survival situations. I was surprised to learn how effective it is.

8. Stop Ants with Oil

Ants can be a problem in Brazil, especially anywhere sugar is stored. To prevent ants from climbing shelves and cupboards,

furniture legs are sometimes set in small tubs like butter comes in, which are filled with motor oil or another oil.

Another option is to hang sugary drinks from the rafters. In my experience, the ants won't typically go all the way up to the roof and then all the way down the string.

9. Witch Hazel for Mosquito Bites

Witch hazel is a multiuse topical medicine that is generally safe to use on toddlers when applied to the skin. It is an astringent, antiseptic, and antipruritic (stops itching). It even appears to have hemostatic properties (slows bleeding.) It is most often used to relieve hemorrhoids, for insect bites (especially weeping or inflamed bites) and minor scrapes.

Since it is multi-use, soothing and doesn't sting, it is my go-to topical medicine for our toddler, who gets a lot of scrapes and bug bites. A few drops of witch hazel and a Paw Patrol Band-Aid usually fixes him right up.

I discovered that it is a first rate antipruritic for mosquito bites when I ran out of sting swabs on a trip to Brazil. I remembered that Tuck's pads were loaded with witch hazel, gave it a try and now it's the first thing I reach for. I carry 3-6ml in a little eye dropper bottle and it does wonders for mosquito bites.

I don't recommend taking it orally, as I have not seen proof that it is effective for any condition when taken orally. Taking witch hazel orally is also potentially dangerous and don't use it with rosacea or on dry skin.

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10. Home Remedies

When you don't always have access to healthcare, home remedies play an especially important role, but we use them even though we do have access to healthcare. Please read about some of our favorite home remedies [here](#). Also check out Nicole Apelian's excellent products on the subject!

Summary

The survival/self-reliance community is truly the salt of the Earth, and I hope that examining everyday adaptations from other cultures helps you to be better prepared as it has for me.