

How to pick a good bushcraft knife

Most survivalists would agree that a good-quality knife is one of the most critical items to have in a survival scenario. Spending some time now to shop for and pick a proper knife that will meet all your needs and budget considerations will save you a lot of stress later down the road.

A bushcraft knife becomes a multi-tool in the wilderness required to perform various tasks with a single design. And just like a multi-tool, you will probably use your knife for tasks it was never designed for.

Some of the most “common” duties of your bushcraft knife will be batoning firewood, lighting a fire using a ferrocerium rod, cleaning game, protecting you from predators, and perhaps a little light digging and assisting you with constructing a shelter.

A knife may not be perfect for all sorts of tasks, but it may be the only tool you have with you when disaster strikes. Given a choice, I would probably use an ax to get firewood for my campfire or light a fire using a butane lighter. However, it will be up to the knife to handle these tasks when the gear mentioned above is missing.



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When it comes to choosing a knife, there are thousands of options in today’s market, and it becomes difficult to cut the

list of options short to a few possible choices and eventually, finding that perfect knife.

Do you get a small carver, or do you go for the big chopper?

How about metal?

Should you go with a stainless steel or carbon steel knife?

Whenever I buy a knife, I try to narrow my list to four or five knives, and then I go to different stores to see and try them in person. After all, knife selection is nothing more than a personal choice, or at least that's what it should be. If the knife feels comfortable in your hand, you will want to use it. If not, you will probably pick something else.

Moving forward, there are several features to be considered when buying a good bushcraft knife.

Fixed versus folder

Some people often wonder if they should get a fixed blade knife or a folding knife. The choice is quite simple here, and there's not much to think about. A folder may be suitable for many tasks and perhaps easier to carry, but you need a fixed blade knife for batoning. Even more, if you get attacked by a predator, fighting for your life using a folding knife may not provide a strong and decisive blow that would save you.

It sure is possible to survive in the wild with nothing more than a folding knife, no doubt about that. However, you would need years of practice and experience in the field using such a knife to build up the confidence that you would survive anything nature throws at you with just your folder. It's better if you stick with the fixed blade knives.

Size matters

Most beginners will go for the largest knife they can afford. Survival movies have perpetuated the myth of survival knives being massive to function and be used properly.

In reality, you probably won't need a very large knife at all since it may be clumsy, and using it for your camping chores may end up being an awkward experience.

In terms of size, you can go with a bushcraft knife with a blade length of about five inches, and the handle should be large enough for you to hold the knife comfortably. So probably, the overall size of the knife you pick should be eight to nine inches.

Once you found a knife with adequate size for your hand, it's time to look at the blade's thickness. As a general rule, the thicker the blade of the knife, the stronger it will be. The problem here is that a thick blade makes the knife heavier, so it's better to choose wisely if you intend on using your knife a lot.

Most people seem to pick knives with a blade between 1/4 to 3/8 thick, which seems to work just fine. The blade is very strong and, at the same time, is not too thick to make the knife heavy and challenging to maneuver for extended periods.

Blade profile

This is one feature that baffles most people considering that there are almost 20 blade profiles, or more precisely, 20 different types of blade shapes. However, the good news for you is that most of these profiles are not suitable for a bushcraft knife.

As a quick example, you should avoid a double-edged knife because it will be worthless for batoning wood. Even more,

they can be problematic for the inexperienced hunter when processing game, and carrying such a knife may be illegal in some states.

For your bushcraft knife, you want to go with a straight-back profile. In this case, the back of the blade makes a straight line from the handle to the point of the knife. Another option would be the drop-point profile when the back of the blade dips slightly just before the tip and according to knife experts lowering the point of the knife makes the tip stronger.

As for the blade's spine, I recommend making sure it is flat and not rounded since you will use this part of the knife to scrape sparks from your Ferro rod. If the spine is rounded, you will not be able to get those sparks, no matter how hard you try. Some bushcrafters use the spine to scrape tinder from fatwood and other materials to protect and save the blade's edge.

Blade grind

The blade grind is the shape of the knife's edge, and there are a few choices to pick from, although I would choose just two, the flat grind or the flat Scandi grind. Both blade grinds are shaped like the V letter if you look down the blade from the tip. The entire blade from the back to the edge tapers to form a V shape for the flat grind. On the flat Scandi grind, which is gaining more and more popularity, the V shape starts more than halfway between the back and the edge.

Many bushcrafters prefer these two strong edges because they can tackle most tasks without problems and are easy to sharpen, even outdoors.

Other folks will pick a convex grind because such a shape makes a solid and durable blade. For the convex grind, the bevels (the parts where the blade tapers) are rounded,

offering strength to the edge.

However, the convex edge is trickier to sharpen than the flat Scandi, especially in the wild, without a sharpening stone or other tools with you.

Steel options

All steel uses carbon and iron as main ingredients, but the added additives determine the type of steel. The type of steel used for making your knife is an essential factor that will eventually influence your purchasing decisions. However, in my case, when having to pick a type of steel from the many options, I often choose between stainless steel or high carbon.

Stainless steel is very corrosion resistant due to its high chromium amount, making it ideal for those that operate in areas with a lot of dampness or those near saltwater. In such a case, go with durable steel like 440C stainless steel.

As you can imagine, high carbon steel doesn't have a high amount of chromium like stainless steel, making it susceptible to rust. If you go with a high carbon blade, you have to take care of your knife and give it a light coat of oil every once in a while to protect it from rust or corrosion.

I pick the 1095 carbon steel because it's good at resisting abrasion and retaining the blade shape. It can withstand a lot of abuse without getting deformed, and it's not a pain to sharpen.

Tang

The tang, or the shank, is the part of the knife that extends into the handle. My recommendation is to go with a full tang where the steel runs from the blade to the butt of the knife at the same width since it's the strongest knife build.

You can also go with a rat tail tang that runs the length of the handle or nearly so, but it's just half as wide as the blade. A knife with a rat tail tang is cheaper and lighter than a knife with a full tang, but at the same time, it's less durable.

Handle

When picking a handle type, it's merely a matter of build and comfort. You have to try the handle before buying the knife since you want something that won't hurt your hand during extensive use. Even more, the handle shouldn't be too thick so that you can't correctly control the knife.

Today, most knives have the handle built from a composite of paper, linen, canvas, fiberglass, carbon fiber, and other Micarta materials. The handle is extremely worn-resistant, and it has enough roughness to it to prevent the handle from slipping from your hand when it's wet.

G-10 is another very popular synthetic material, and it's a glass-based epoxy resin laminate. Again, it is very popular because it can be machined into different styles of textures and shapes.

Another great option is wood, especially if you're concerned about durability and the looks of your knife. Oak is a highly popular choice because it makes for a beautiful, durable, and stable handle. There are many options when picking a handle made of wood, and I've seen some great handles made from exotic woods that drove up the price of the knife quite a bit.

Sheath

When picking a sheath for your knife, the most common options you will encounter are leather and Kydex. I like the leather sheaths because they are much quieter, and there's no noise

when pulling out the knife from a leather sheath.

The Kydex is a plastic material that is thermoformed into various products, especially holsters and sheaths. They are waterproof, very tough, and won't stretch or lose their shape in time, as in leather sheaths. However, these types of sheaths have that click-clack sound when pulling a knife out, and I don't like it. Once again, this is just me, and some folks have no problem with it.

Regardless of what type of sheath you pick, you have to ensure it holds your knife securely, even if you turn it upside down. Also, look for sheaths that have attachment points beyond the belt loop because you will carry your knife much easily with additional carry options.

Concluding

Buying a bushcraft knife is an important investment, and you shouldn't cheap out since your life may one day depend on the knife you picked. Do your homework and make sure you choose the right knife for you. In the end, buying any knife is a personal choice, but you should be informed and make the right call. Hopefully, this article will be a starting point if you decide to buy a bushcraft knife.



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