

How to survive on a wilderness diet

Surviving in the wilderness is often a challenge, even for those who are well-prepared and have plenty of resources. There are many things that can go wrong, and Mother Nature doesn't offer second chances. Now imagine if you lack food or have exhausted all your provisions.

What can you do to avoid starving? What can you do to avoid ending up like Christopher McCandless?

Some might say that foraging, hunting, or fishing will suffice until help arrives. This may be true if you have the skills to perform these tasks and if time is on your side. However, obtaining food might not be a priority if building a shelter or finding water is more urgent. Various scenarios may require you to reassess your situation and adjust your priorities based on your survival needs.

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And let's not forget that not everyone may have the appropriate gear for fishing, hunting, or foraging. Or perhaps you become separated from your bag and can no longer rely on the gear you brought. There are many scenarios that can occur in the wilderness, and the only things you can truly count on are your knowledge and skills.

Survival Diet versus Normal Diet

In the wilderness, your normal diet, complete with all the snacks and everything you can think of, will be replaced by a survival diet—one that is more scarce and likely won't cover all your nutritional needs. To understand this, we need to recognize the differences between the two.

A normal diet typically consists of a variety of foods that provide balanced nutrition, including carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. It's the most common diet (or at least it should be) and includes fruits, vegetables, grains, meats, and dairy products. The goal of such a diet is to maintain overall health and meet daily energy needs. This diet usually includes a surplus of food, as fewer people can resist stress eating or indulge themselves with occasional treats.

A survival diet, on the other hand, focuses on the basic nutritional requirements needed to stay alive in a wilderness situation where food sources are limited. It often involves consuming whatever is available in the wild and prioritizes calorie-dense and nutrient-rich foods that can sustain you over time. It should be noted that such a diet will not meet all nutritional needs and will barely cover the minimum required to keep you alive. This situation is common for more than 90% of people who get lost in the wilderness.

The nutritional priorities of a survival diet are as follows:

Water is the top priority because, without it, survival is compromised. No matter the environment you find yourself in, you should ensure you have a reliable water source or several purification methods before focusing on food.

Calories are the immediate need in a wilderness diet, as they help maintain energy levels. Caloric intake is crucial, and you may need to rely on high-calorie foods like nuts, seeds, and fats (if available).

Proteins are also essential for muscle repair and overall bodily function. You will likely need to engage in high-intensity activities (such as climbing or digging), and your body needs to sustain itself until these survival tasks are completed. In the wild, obtaining protein may involve hunting small game, fishing, or foraging for insects.

Vitamins and **minerals** are important in any diet, but in a survival situation, obtaining them might not be a priority, although some foraged plants can help cover these needs. The immediate focus is often on calories and hydration.

Food sources in the wild

I won't cover water procurement methods in this article, as I've discussed them a couple of times before, and there is also a wealth of information available on this topic on Survivopedia. Instead, I will focus on food sources and what the average person needs to do to survive in the wild.

The average person can procure calories and proteins in the wild using the methods listed below. For the purposes of this article, I've also included some of the most common species for each category to give readers an idea of what to look for.

Foraging

Foraging for edible plants is an essential skill for wilderness survival, especially in the United States, where there is an abundance of edible plants. Some common edible plants found across various regions of the U.S. include:

- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*): The leaves, flowers, and roots of the dandelion are high in vitamins A, C, and K, but also contain minerals like calcium and iron.
- Clover (*Trifolium* spp.): The leaves, flowers, and seeds

of clover are rich in protein and vitamins A and C.

- Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*): Purslane's edible leaves and stems are high in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins A and C, and antioxidants.
- Plantain (*Plantago major* and *Plantago lanceolata*): The leaves and seeds of plantain are nutritious, providing vitamins A and C, as well as dietary fiber.
- Lamb's Quarters (*Chenopodium album*): The leaves, stems, and seeds of lamb's quarters are edible and rich in vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron.

Gathering insects

This may not sound appealing to some, but edible insects can provide both calories and protein. Here are some insects you should look for:

- Crickets (*Gryllidae* family): Crickets are high in protein (60-70% by dry weight) and also provide essential vitamins, such as B vitamins, and minerals, including iron and zinc.
- Mealworms (*Tenebrio molitor*): Mealworms are rich in protein (about 50% by dry weight) and healthy fats. They also contain significant amounts of vitamins, including B vitamins, and minerals like iron and magnesium.
- Grasshoppers (*Caelifera* suborder): Grasshoppers are also high in protein content (about 60-70% by dry weight) and

provide good amounts of essential nutrients, such as B vitamins and iron.

- Silkworms (*Bombyx mori*): Silkworm larvae offer high protein content (around 50% by dry weight) and are rich in vitamins, including B12, and minerals like calcium and potassium.
- Ants (Formicidae family): Various species of ants, including leafcutter ants and carpenter ants, are edible and provide a good source of protein (around 30-40% by dry weight). They also offer vitamins and minerals.

Fishing

While fishing is a leisure activity for most of us, survival fishing is a different matter. In a wilderness setting, try to catch the following fish for your diet:

- Trout: Trout are a rich source of high-quality protein and healthy fats, including omega-3 fatty acids. They also provide essential vitamins such as B12 and minerals like selenium and potassium.
- Bass: Both largemouth and smallmouth bass are high in protein and provide a good amount of healthy fats. They also offer vitamins B6 and B12, as well as minerals like magnesium and phosphorus.
- Catfish: Catfish are a good source of protein and provide essential vitamins such as niacin (B3) and B12, along with minerals like calcium and iron. They are also relatively high in fat.

- **Salmon:** Salmon is highly nutritious, offering a rich supply of protein and omega-3 fatty acids. Salmon also provides significant amounts of vitamins B12, D, and selenium.
- **Pike:** Pike are high in protein and provide essential vitamins such as B12, as well as minerals like potassium and phosphorus.

Trapping and Hunting

Listed last, these activities might be too challenging for the average person. However, if you have the necessary skills, consider trying to hunt some of these animals:

- **Rabbit:** Rabbit meat is lean and high in protein, providing about 20-30 grams of protein per 100 grams of meat. It also contains essential vitamins like B12 and minerals such as phosphorus and potassium.
- **Squirrel:** Squirrel meat is a good source of protein (about 20 grams per 100 grams of meat) and provides vitamins B6 and B12, along with minerals like iron and zinc.
- **Wild Turkey:** Wild turkey is high in protein (about 30 grams per 100 grams of meat) and provides essential nutrients such as vitamins B6 and B12, but also minerals like selenium and phosphorus.
- **Deer:** Venison (deer meat) is rich in protein (about 25-30 grams per 100 grams of meat) and is low in fat compared to other red meats. It also provides vitamins

B6 and B12, as well as essential minerals like iron and zinc.

- Raccoon: Raccoon meat offers a good source of protein (about 20 grams per 100 grams of meat) and provides vitamins B6 and B12, along with minerals like iron and zinc.

The pitfalls of a wilderness diet

I couldn't finish this article without sharing my thoughts on the wilderness diet, as I've spent a lot of time in the wild and know how challenging finding food can be.

First of all, foraging is a skill that takes years to master, and if not done properly, it can be dangerous. Always bring a guide and avoid eating plants if you're not sure they are edible.

Second, fishing requires a minimum amount of gear, and without it, you may find yourself going hungry. Your best bet is to learn some improvised survival fishing techniques and practice them whenever you can.

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Third, eating insects is the most reliable method to ensure you get some calories and protein. The downside is that not everyone can stomach insects, and not everyone can correctly

identify edible species.

Lastly, trapping and hunting are the most challenging endeavors of all the methods listed in this article. It's likely that you won't be able to trap or hunt the animals mentioned.

So what can you do?

If I were you, I would focus on one or two skills from those listed above, as mastering all of them is nearly impossible. Find what suits you best and stick with it. With enough practice, you'll be able to procure a meal if you ever find yourself forced to survive in the wild.