

Excess Stuff in Your Bug Out Bag

The bug out bag isn't only a very important part of prepping, it's a very personal one too. I've seen a wide variety of bug out bags through the years, with a wide variety of things that people had in them.

While there is common ground that we can find in most bug out bags, there's also plenty of room for people to take along things that they think they need. They may have gotten that idea from some survival video they've seen or some bug out bag list they've found on the internet. Either way; they've decided to include it, whether it really makes sense or not.

As far as I'm concerned, everything in that bug out bag has to have a reason, or it shouldn't be there. Just because Uncle Fred carries one, you carried one back in the Army, or your favorite survival guru swears by it, doesn't mean that it makes sense for you. Ultimately, you're the one who's going to have to carry it and you're the one who's hopefully going to be using it.

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Through the years, my personal bug out bag has changed from time to time. In a way, you could say that it is in a constant process change, even if individual changes may be months or even a year apart. Some of those changes have come from finding better gear to replace what I already had; but other changes have come from changes in my survival strategy. A change in my ultimate destination and how long I expect it to take me to get there can result in a huge change in what I'm

carrying.

Any bug out bag really needs be birthed out of survival plan. What I mean by that, is that there's really no such thing as a "generic" bug out bag. Or, at least, there shouldn't be. None of us can afford to be carrying extra weight; so, we need to know what we expect to use and pack just those things. That doesn't mean leaving out what we might need for contingencies, like the weather turning bad. But a bug out bag and an INCH bag (I'm never coming home) aren't the same thing. Turning a bug out bag into an INCH bag doesn't make sense, if we're just going 100 miles up the road to a planned and prepared survival retreat or to some friend's house, which will be our retreat.

Before We Start

Before getting into the items that I want to mention, let me throw one thing out there, which I think we all need to remember. That is, people have been backpacking for a lot longer than the modern prepping movement and they've learned just about everything there is to know about packing light. Backpackers typically go out in the woods for a week or more, carrying plenty of food, changes of clothing, sleeping bags and tents. If they can do that, why can't we?

My List of Excess Stuff

With that in mind, I'd like to mention some things I see people including in their bug out bags, which appear to me to be nothing more than excess weight. Perhaps they have a good reason for carrying them; but that doesn't mean that you and I do.

The Pack Itself

You obviously have to have a pack for your bug out bag. While I've seen some people talk about using a duffel or something

similar, I don't agree with them. A backpack is the easiest thing to carry, making it the only practical solution for a bug out bag, as far as I'm concerned.

The thing I'm questioning is just what kind of backpack you might be using. When I built my first true bug out bag, I used a tactical backpack for it. I soon realized that wasn't a good decision; because the backpack itself was heavier than it needed to be. Backpacking packs are considerably lighter than tactical packs. Their packs might not look "tacti-cool," but then, our tacti-cool might just attract people we'd rather not attract.

Multi-tool

I see a muti-tool included on pretty much every bug out bag list I run across. It was so common, that I actually bought one and included it in my pack as well. That is, I included it until I realized that I couldn't think of one situation, out in the woods, where I'd need it.

Multi-tools are designed to give you what you need to make basic repairs. That makes sense in some situations. People carry them so that they are ready to do just that. But just what are you going to repair, out in the woods, with a screwdriver or a pair of pliers? I'll stick with my knife and leave the multi-tool at home.

Tomahawk

Somehow, the tomahawk has become a popular replacement for a hatchet. They look similar, so it seems that there are a lot of preppers who think it's better to have a tomahawk, which they can use both as a hatchet and as a backup weapon. There's only one thing... the tomahawk makes a horrible hatchet.

Try splitting some small logs for the fire with a tomahawk sometime and you'll see what I mean. The basic problem is that

the blade is too thin. Hatchets, and mauls used for splitting wood, have wide heads, which work as a wedge to force the two sides of the log apart, as the blade pushes its way into the log. The tomahawk will push its way into the end of the log, but it won't spread the two sides, splitting them.

Blue Tarps

Don't get confused here; I'm not saying to not take a tarp; I'm just saying to avoid the cheap blue tarps which you see everywhere. Those aren't what you need for survival. To start with, they're too heavy for their size. Added to that, they tear too easily, especially in the wind. Carrying one of those is asking it to fail, right when you need it.

Rather than carrying one of those, I'd recommend looking for an "ultralight tarp." Yes, they exist and they've been developed for the backpacking crowd. They're considerably stronger, and a whole lot lighter. Some can even do double duty as a tent or a rain poncho. You'll pay more for it; but it won't fail when you need it.

El-cheapo "Survival" Blankets

The aluminized Mylar survival blankets which are found all over the prepping community are intended to be disposable; not for extended use. While they're nice and compact and do a good job as heat reflectors, they aren't very strong. They're not designed to be strong. Try using it as a shelter for a few nights in a row or even to cover a tent for a few nights in a row, and it will be in tatters.

Those survival blankets are designed for survival kits; not bug out bags. What you need for your bug out bag is a "heavy duty survival blanket. These have the same aluminized Mylar on one side, with a heavier material on the other. They are edged to keep them from tearing and even have grommets in the corners. You can use one over and over, as a tent, tent cover,

ground sheet, or pretty much anywhere you'd use a tarp.

Too Much Ammo

There are those who say that you're not truly prepared, unless you have 10,000 rounds of ammo. They'll even tell you how you should have that split up, to make sure you have what you need. Yeah... I don't think so.

Here's the problem: unless you're talking about hunting for food for the rest of your life, there's little chance that you'll survive long enough to use all that ammo. If you get into that many fights, chances are that you will be dead, long before you use that many rounds; I don't care how good you are.

Of course, if you have to bug out, you're not going to be able to carry all 10,000 rounds. Infantry soldiers, serving in the US Army, carry a basic load of 210 rounds, seven magazines of 30 rounds each. One of those magazines are in their weapon, and the other six are on their chest plate. That's supposed to be enough ammo for a day's worth of fighting. I doubt you'll need more than that.

Excessive Cookware

Cookware can be kind of tricky, when you're trying to make sure you can eat while you're bugging out. Some types of food tend to take one type of cookware, while others need something else. But if you chose your food carefully, you can do just about everything in one saucepan. If that saucepan is a shallow one, it can serve as a frying pan as well.

Stick to Teflon-coated aluminum for weight. Aluminum cookware has been found to be dangerous, because the aluminum can come off in the food, especially with acidic foods, like tomatoes. The Teflon protects you from that happening, without adding anything noticeable in weight.

Too Many Fire Starters

The old standard I learned was to carry two primary fire starters and two secondary ones. What they really means is that you end up carrying around back-up fire starters that you're never going to use. Why would anyone use a difficult to work with fire starter, when they could use matches or a lighter?



The thing to do is to make sure that your fire starters are reliable. I spent the extra money for a refillable stormproof lighter. It will start 1,000 fires, just like people claim that disposable butane lighters will, but it will do it in the middle of a storm. Try doing that with your \$1 disposable lighter.

Water Purification Tablets

This one may seem a bit surprising; but I don't see any use for water purification tablets in a bug out bag. Those are only to be used in situations where there is no other way to purify water. If you've got a bug out bag, then you have the means to start a fire and boil water to purify it. Hopefully, you've got a better water purifier in there as well.

Don't get me wrong; there's a place for those water purification tablets; just not in a bug out bag. I always include some in survival kits. But that's for emergency use, when I can't use another water purifier or boil water. Considering the taste of water that has been purified with those tablets, I wouldn't want to use them any time I didn't

really need to.