

How to make an emergency kit for winter wilderness activities

If you're like me and you like to spend time in the great outdoors during the winter, you must be prepared to handle the harsh weather and make sure you're able to return safely to your loved ones.

Perhaps you are the kind of person who likes to practice winter sports or participate in backwoods activities that bring you far from civilization and safety. Regardless of your reasons for traveling to the backcountry to enjoy the white scenery, it would help if you considered preparing an emergency kit that would help you survive when you find yourself miles from anything.

In my case, when I go visit my brother to organize our annual snowmobile trip, we always prepare a kit to help us deal with the unexpected as we're always looking for distant backwoods locations to discover new settings with fresh, virgin snow. Since we often end up in deeply remote areas without cell service or immediate aid, it pays going out prepared.

Kit up for the adventure

After years of prepping and exploring the wilderness, I still find it strange that most folks will pack pretty much anything when they go camping in the vicinity of their home. Yet, when it comes to those hopping on a snowmobile, traveling miles away from civilization, they bring almost nothing with them.

The same goes for people that head out for the day on cross-country skis or snowshoes, and they, in a best-case scenario, bring a backpack with water and a few snacks.

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Folks will venture out in nature with pretty much whatever's in their pockets, and they fail to see the danger in being away from civilization, unprepared, even if it's just for "a few hours." Chance favors the prepared mind, so it's better to bring along some emergency kit to help you survive if things go south.

Assume that things will go wrong and bring enough supplies to help sustain yourself through the night if it gets too late and you're not back home. It's dangerous to travel at night in an unfamiliar wilderness, and if you do so, you will worsen a bad situation.

If you want to make an emergency winter kit, below you will find a list of items vital for your survival. I often bring these items along when I go out in the winter, regardless of whether it's for a snowmobile ride or if it's just a few hours photo trip. They will comfortably fit in a waterproof backpack of about 10 to 20 liters in a capacity that can be carried easily or strapped to your snowmobile.

This list is meant to be a guideline, and you can adjust it based on your needs and your skillset. All the listed items will help you during a survival scenario and will help you keep your focus sharp and maintain mental well-being until you return to civilization.

- **Fire kit:** Fire is essential in any survival scenario, and it can help heat yourself, cook food, melt snow to have enough drinking water, or be used as a rescue signal or animal deterrent. Besides your Bic lighter, I recommend a Ferro rod, Vaseline cotton balls, or other highly flammable material. It's also recommended to have

some emergency tinder source and some lighter fluid (fill a small, leakproof container) to help you get a fire going in a hurry in case needed.

- **Food:** Food is not essential, but it's good to have it with you just in case since the winter activities may lower your energy levels faster than you may expect it. Food will provide energy and mental boost during a survival scenario, and it will also help you regulate your body temperature comfortably. Bring a few protein bars and a few MREs since these are light, small, and can be used quickly.
- **Water:** I always carry water no matter what I do or where I go, and I've learned to stay hydrated even if I don't feel like drinking water. A bottle or two might be enough since you can always melt snow in case needed. However, I almost always include flavor packets for my water in the wilderness, such as hot chocolate or bullion cubes to make a broth. A hot drink makes a lot of difference when you're cold and feeling miserable.
- **Steel coffee cup:** A small steel coffee cup will help you melt snow and boil the resulting water to make it potable, but it can also help you make that hot cocoa or any other flavor beverage of your liking.
- **Collapsible stove:** Since you have your fire kit, it would also be wise to pack a small collapsible/folding stove (like the firebox) and a few fuel tabs if the area you're traveling to has limited wood resources. You will need it to heat your water and food.
- **Tarp:** A tarp is indispensable during the winter season if you need to improvise a shelter. You cannot survive the night without a proper shelter during the cold months. There are so many models available right now on the market that you may find something lightweight that folds up very small. You can also bring along an emergency blanket or one or two heavy-duty garbage bags for added insulation.
- **Paracord:** Paracord is rather cheap nowadays, and you can

even get it cheaper from an Army surplus store. It's recommended to carry at least 25feet of paracord with five to seven internal filaments to help you build any shelter when you find yourself in the field. Keep it wrapped tightly around the tarp and garbage bags.

- **A good knife:** When picking a knife for the wilderness, you need to get something designed for the outdoors. I have many knives, but I take a fixed blade knife that can withstand abuse whenever I go out camping. Remember that you get what you pay for, so if you don't want to get disappointed, stick with a reputable brand that provides good quality.
- **Collapsible saw:** A small collapsible saw will help you build a shelter by cutting down branches and using them for support or insulation, or it can help you harvest wood for building a fire. For example, finding dry wood is rather difficult in the winter months, but you can look for dead trees and use your saw to cut small, usable chunks.
- **Warmers:** You can buy various air-activated warmers (like HotHands) that can help you keep your hands, feet, or body warm. Some of these warmers can last up to 18 hours, and they come in various sizes. These are ideal for people suffering from poor circulation with their feet always freezing.
- **Compass:** Keeping a compass on you is recommended if you head into the wilderness, and it will help you get a bearing if you get lost.
- **Flashlight:** If you have the habit of wandering around until sundown, take a flashlight with you. A flashlight will come in handy if you are out past dark, and make sure you include extra batteries. Keep the batteries on an inside pocket close to your core to ensure they perform best when needed. You may say that you don't need a flashlight since you will get a fire going using your fire kit when the night comes. If that's the case, you probably haven't used a Ferro rod at night to start

a fire, and you don't know how challenging it can be.

- **First aid kit:** When it comes to first aid kits, there are all sorts of kits available on the market designed for various activities. You can buy a commercial kit designed for outdoor adventures, like the mountain first aid kits, or you can improvise a first aid kit and bring along only basic items (for example, you already have a mylar emergency blanket in your emergency kit, so there's no need to get first aid kit that has one included).
- **Signaling items:** While you can build a fire to signal for help, there may be situations in which you lack the resources to build a long-lasting fire or the nature of the survival scenario may force you to use alternatives. It pays to have a whistle or a signaling mirror in such cases. You can use the signal mirror to make yourself visible to planes or ground rescue crews miles away. Since you can't yell for a long time, it's better if you use a whistle to make yourself heard to nearby search parties. Also, consider bringing a plastic one since it won't freeze.
- **Personal locator beacon:** You should learn how to signal for help if you like to venture into the backcountry, but it's also recommended to increase your chances of being found quickly by using other means. Get yourself a personal locator beacon if you can afford it since such devices can send a distress signal to rescue personnel. Such devices can cost between \$300 and \$800 depending on what type of data they send.
- **Firearm:** When I go into the wilderness, I bring a firearm along, usually a handgun. Firearm selection is personal for many folks, but you should carry something you feel comfortable with. Bring an extra magazine or speed loaders if you carry a revolver. Chances are you may encounter a wild animal that sees you like food, and you should be able to protect yourself if that animal decides to attack you.

A final word

Even if you bring along all the gear that I've listed in this article, chances are you may turn a seemingly harmless situation into something worse if you don't have the knowledge to use those items to their full extent. If you don't have a basic understanding of survival-related skills and your items still have the tags on them, you won't be able to save yourself. Always familiarize yourself with your gear and put it to the test before heading out.

If you find yourself stranded in the wilderness during the winter months, you will decrease your chances of survival by figuring out how to build a shelter or start a fire using wet wood. The subzero temperatures and time will work against you, and you need to do some research and practice before you put your life on the line. Be prepared and stay safe!



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to find out more on the first aid techniques that will save your life when surviving in the wilderness!