Size Matters? How To Choose Your Bushcraft Tools Wisely

You know the old saying that bigger is better, right? Well when it comes to bushcraft tools, one may wonder how to choose wisely the right tool for the job. Since the name of the game is wilderness survival, the perfect multi-purpose tool for the job is the proverbial blade also known as the survival knife.

And if you're wondering why I am talking about knives when we're supposed to be discussing bushcraft tools, a high quality, solid knife *is* the perfect bushcraft tool, at least in my opinion. Depending on its size and shape, a bushcraft/survival knife can be described as the quintessential multi-purpose tool.

For tens of thousands of years, the cutting blade was a man's best friend in the wilderness, as it was an indispensable tool in basically any survival scenario. The bushcraft knife will serve you well when it comes to meeting basic survival needs, also known as the holy trinity: water, food, and shelter.

On top of that, a bushcraft knife will play a big part in making a fire. If we're talking about a jack of all trades, a full tang-high quality blade is a must have bushcraft tool in any scenario imaginable. Which brings us to today's topic, because size matters: how much blade (as in length) is enough?

How much blade do you need?

Are you playing in the Crocodile Dundee category or do you just want the perfect all-arounder to fulfill your specific needs?

Video first seen on Dave Hughes.

Well, this is an almost philosophical question because everything depends on personal preferences.

However, a proper bushcraft knife must help you survive, and for that to happen, it must be able to handle a variety of functions, including self-defense, digging (very important when building a shelter), slicing, cutting, food-prep, first aid (as a tool of sorts), hunting weapon, fire making, prying tool, hammering … you get the idea, right?

Why Bigger Is Not Necessarily Better

When choosing the perfect bushcraft tool, whether it’s a knife or anything else, you must keep in mind that less is typically more, as function always trumps styling, regardless of what you’ve seen on the lobotomy box (TV).

Which brings us to our initial problem: size matters, indeed, but **bigger is not necessarily better** when it comes to choosing the perfect bushcraft tool. If a blade is way too big, you won’t be able to use it for detailed tasks such as carving precision gear (think snare sets) or dressing small game.

However, there’s a flipside to that coin: a small blade can’t be used for heavy-duty tasks or rugged jobs like chopping and batoning. A bigger blade would come handy when splitting wood or cutting trees, provided you don’t have anything available but your bushcraft knife.

And there’s always the issue with **the ratio between the blade’s thickness and its length**. The thing is, a longer blade will provide you with more leverage for heavy-duty tasks.

There are disadvantages too; for example, as the leverage increases, so do the odds of breaking the blade. A long and thin blade can be compared to a kitchen knife, while a shorter and thicker blade is more like a chisel. Do you see where this

is going?

A bushcraft knife should be **thicker and probably shorter than a regular knife** if you’re looking for sturdiness and reliability.

After using a number of survival knives, I think the ideal size for a bushcraft knife is about 10 inches, and I am talking about overall length, which puts the blade length at about 5 inches, give or take, depending on the design.

Obviously, a hardcore bushcraft knife must be **a full tang-fixed blade** – forget about folders as they’re not as reliable/durable as fixed blades.

A 4-5-inch blade, provided it’s made of high quality steel, can be used for basically any task imaginable, making for the ideal combo of portability and efficiency. And speaking of practicality, a 5-inch blade knife is very comfy to carry around at all times.

The thing is, the best knife/bushcraft tool in the world would not help you out a bit if it sits cozy in your closet or in your gear bag. What you have on your person when SHTF is what makes a difference in a survival situation, right?

Big knives like machetes or 10-12-inch long bowie knives are pretty cool looking and definitely usable in a survival scenario, but they’re not the definition of practicality. A large blade can be really useful when it comes to chopping wood, yet it would never match an axe/hatchet in this department and it would be completely useless at finer tasks.

And if you think you can’t fell trees with a 5-incher, think again; everything’s about technique.

Video first seen on IA Woodsman.

However, if you’re looking into serious woodwork, you should

consider carrying a hatchet together with your bushcraft knife. A medium-sized, 5-inch blade together with a hatchet would make for the perfect bushcraft survival combo.

Carrying a large knife only (a 12-incher for example, or a machete) would fill an intermediate role but it would not excel at either end compared to a a 5-incher/hatchet combo.

So, now that we've been through all the reasons, hopefully you can see why I believe that a 5-inch blade would make for the best bushcraft tool.

It's fairly easy to carry around and it can be used for a multitude of purposes, i.e. to cut branches for improvising a shelter, to prepare firewood, to clean small game/fish, and it's also more likely that you'll have it on your person 24/7, whereas a 12-inch bowie knife or machete is more likely to sit at home on a shelf or stuffed in your bug-out bag somewhere.

When all is said and done, a smaller knife would serve you best as a bushcraft tool. You can go a little bigger, but I'd recommend keeping it under 7 inches, with the ideal size being between 4 and 5 inches.

If you take a look at what bushcraft experts are carrying, you'd see that Ray Mears, Mors Kochanski, Les Stroud, and Cody Lundin are all using bushcraft knives of roughly the same size: 4-5 inch blades.

And forget about the appeal-to-authority fallacy: just try it for yourself, and bottom line, choose wisely and don't skimp on quality when it comes to survival gear! Your survival might depend on this!

I hope the article helped. If you have questions or suggestions, feel free to comment in the dedicated section below.