

Top 13 Survival Items You'll Want To Scavenge

Just about every post-apocalyptic survival novel you read talks about the main characters scavenging to meet their needs for supplies.

Yet this is the part of survival that is almost never discussed in the prepping and survival community. That could be because we are law-abiding citizens and scavenging is a bit too close to the looting of criminals; an act which we all condemn.

Yet, if there is a true TEOTWAWKI event, the only equipment and supplies which we will have access to are either those we own or those we can glean from the environment around us. For those of us who live in urban areas, probably the only resources we'll find, other than water, are man-made ones.

Of course, we will be able to make some things for ourselves, even grow food for ourselves, but even that will require access to the necessary resources.

This means either taking things that others have abandoned or taking things that others own. Either way, it boils down to property that does or did belong to others. So the first thing we have to deal with, is the moral question about when it is looting and when it is legitimate scavenging.

Looting vs. Scavenging

We've all seen looting, at least on television.

A disaster strikes or a riot occurs and people of questionable morals see it as an opportunity for personal enrichment, stealing big screen televisions, high dollar tennis shoes and anything else they can. These people are stealing things from

the people who own them, and they are doing it to fulfill a personal desire, nothing more.

The first difference between the two is that scavenging deals with taking things you need, not that you just want.

Needing food to eat or tools to help you survive isn't stealing just to have something, it's merely being done to survive. A man who breaks into your freezer to steal food for his starving children isn't looting, even though he's taking something that belongs to someone else.

Secondly, scavenging properly means only taking things that others don't need. This either means that the original owners are no longer there, because they have left or are dead, or it means things that people have discarded. There's a lot of "trash" which can be repurposed to help you survive.

This second point can be extremely tricky, simply because it can be hard to determine where the original owners of the items are. If they are dead and you know it, that's one thing; but what if they're trying to make their way back home in the wake of a disaster? You might not have any way of knowing that. This leaves a "grey area" where you will have to be guided by your own moral compass.

Please note that it is never okay to take things, just because everyone else is. Mob rule can take over in the wake of a disaster, with people breaking into stores to steal supplies they need. But those supplies still have an owner, the owner of the store, even if that owner is a major corporation.

Speaking of Major Corporations

Things can get even stickier when it comes to rebuilding after a disaster, especially a TEOTWAWKI event. In the case of an EMP or other grid-down event, rebuilding will most likely require equipment and materials that are locked away in

warehouses which are no longer doing business after the disaster. While that equipment technically still has an owner, there may very well be a need to take their assets for the public good.

The way this is normally dealt with is that the items in question are taken by whatever government is in place, in the name of the people. While it is still stealing from the viewpoint of the person who loses those goods, doing it in the name of the government at least gives it the patina of legitimacy.

This sort of scavenging requires much more preparation than scavenging for your personal needs. First, there's the need of figuring out what is needed; then there is the need of figuring out who has it. If you are an engineer or other technical professional who might find yourself in such a place, helping your community, you might want to add an old-fashioned printed phone book to your prepping stockpile, to help find these suppliers.

Equipping to Scavenge

Other than things that people have discarded, most scavenging requires breaking and entering in some way. This is another moral issue, as breaking and entering are clearly criminal activities, against the law in every jurisdiction I know of. Some would say that if there is nobody enforcing the law, there is no law. However, based on US history, I would say that vigilante groups will probably rise up in many communities to enforce the law.

On the flip side of this moral coin is the need to take care of your family, one of the biggest moral responsibilities there is. Each of us will ultimately have to make the decision in our own minds, which side the coin falls on.

Either way, if you're going to do any scavenging, you need to

be prepared. This means having the right equipment and knowing the right techniques to make it possible for you to get into places that you probably should be getting into, to get things that others probably don't want you to get. So, what's it going to take for this?

- A good crowbar
- Lock picks and the knowledge to use them
- Some sort of cart for hauling away the goods you find
- Containers to carry bulk and liquid items
- A good flashlight or "headlamp" and extra batteries
- Chain and padlocks for re-securing areas where you have scavenged
- A good imagination for figuring out how you can repurpose things

Keep in mind that as you are undertaking any scavenging activity, there will probably be others who see what you are doing. Some of these people may try to get in on what you are doing or even take what you have scavenged. So the ability to defend yourself, while in the midst of this activity is critical.

Survival scavenging is best undertaken by small groups, rather than individually, so that some can keep guard, while others do the scavenging.

Repurposing Scavenged Items

We must realize that the chances of finding food while scavenging are extremely slim. One of the first things that will happen after a disaster will be the looting and vandalism of grocery stores, cleaning out any quick supply of food. This

will shortly be followed by doing the same to food warehouses and any semi tractor-trailers which might be filled with food. That will take a little longer, just because most people won't know where to find them; but it will happen nevertheless.

Trying to scavenge food from homes will probably be futile as well, as if there is food there, the people will probably be there as well. Most people only have a few days worth of food in their homes to start with, and if they leave in the wake of a disaster, they'll probably try and take what they have with them.

This is not to say that scavenging is not worthwhile, just that doing it to find food is probably not going to yield much in the way of results. Rather, focus your scavenging on finding other equipment and supplies that you might need. If you find food as well, that's all for the better. But if not, you haven't wasted a lot of time on a focused search for food.

There are many other things you might find, which could be useful in a survival situation, such as:

- First-aid supplies
- Over-the-counter medicines
- Tools, especially hand-operated ones
- Hand-operated kitchen tools
- Wood that can be used as firewood
- Bicycles
- Carts, baby carriages and children's wagons that can be used to haul things
- Camping gear
- Seed for gardening

- Spices and seasonings to make your food more palatable
- Books with useful information
- Gasoline in abandoned cars and lawn mowers
- Clothing, especially important as your children grow

Of course, this is just a sampling of the things you could find. As time goes on, probably more and more people will die, making their goods available to scavengers. This is unfortunate for those who would die, but fortunate for those who will be left alive, as they will need the goods of those who have died to replace their own goods which have worn out over time. Living a post-disaster survival lifestyle will be much harder on our possessions, than the life we live today.

The other part of this is that we will have to develop the means to do many things by hand, which we are accustomed to doing with power tools or small appliances today. In some cases, such as a forge for working metal, we might have to make tools which we don't use today. This will have to be out of scavenged materials, as those will be the only materials available.

Stockpiling What You Can Scavenge

Scavenging is really only worthwhile if we're talking a long-term survival situation, such as you would encounter after a true TEOTWAWKI event. In that case, with no relief in sight, those who survive are going to have to make the best of the resources available to them, even if those resources belonged to someone else before.

One of the things that anyone who attempts to scavenge must understand is that you get what you can, when you can. You may be looking for tools, but if you find first-aid supplies you can use, you grab them. If you don't, they may not be available when you need them.

This mean that anyone who is going to be scavenging is also going to be creating a stockpile of the oddest assortment of things you can imagine. Their homes will end up looking like a junkyard, just because of all the miscellaneous things they have found. That's okay, if they can't use it themselves, they can always barter it off to someone who does need that particular thing.