

BACKPACKING 101

When hiking or backpacking, it is highly recommended to bring the [10 essential items](#). A topographic map and compasses (and the ability to use them) should be carried by **each** person, just-in-case. GPS units are also good but are **not** a substitute for a map and compass. Also remember to bring good common sense. Hiking is a personal choice and requires personal responsibility. Hiking and associated trail activities are dangerous and can result in injury and/or death. Hiking exposes you to risks. Risks are mitigated, but NOT eliminated by training or skill. [Friends Hiking Club](#) assumes ABSOLUTELY NO responsibility, including but not limited to injury or loss due to the use of information, or participating in activities found on it's site.

Preparation

There is no substitute for training. Treadmill walking is a sorry substitute for trail walking. Day hiking can **help** you get ready for backpacking **if** you are hiking with the weight that you will be carrying on the backpacking trip. Also, remember to try the clothes and gear that you intend to use while backpacking well **before** the trip; blisters and ill-fitting clothes/gear can make for a long trip. Become familiar with where you pack certain items, how to set up your shelter in the dark and read a topographic map.

Consider the weight when you are *buying* gear and later when you are *packing* it.

If you travel 'light' you will:

- a) Enjoy the trip more.
- b) Be able to travel further, faster.
- c) Feel better at the end of the day.
- d) Be raring to go the following day

Your fellow [Friends Hiking Club](#) members, some of whom have 30+ years of backpacking experience, are a wealth of knowledge; I would suggest you enlist their counsel before making large gear purchases. The sales people at [REI](#), [Az Hiking Shack](#), and other retailers **may** be helpful, but are there to sell gear that THEY carry, not necessarily what YOU need. And sometimes they have limited field experience. REI does have a great return policy, but for the best buy, shop their online [REI-Outlet](#), which offers free shipping to their local stores for pickup.

THE 'BIG THREE': PACK / SLEEPING BAG / SHELTER

The fit of your backpack is as important as the fit of your shoes. Backpacks may be *adjusted*, but should be generally comfortable on you before the adjustments will likely help. I have listed packs first, but yours should likely be purchased last, after you know how much volume and weight bearing capacity you may need.

Lightweight Pack Suggestions

[Osprey](#) 'Atmos 50', Osprey 'Exos 58', [Granite Gear](#) 'Vapor Trail' (men), 'Vapor Ki' (women). [REI](#) has a few offerings that are nicely made; such as their 'Flash' line of packs.

Sleeping Bag Suggestions

The **best** bags, hands down, are [Western Mountaineering](#); of course they are expensive. The most versatile WM bag is likely the 'Ultralite', a 20 degree bag that's likely good down to 15 degrees. [Marmot](#) and [Feathered Friends](#) also make very nice bags, similar in quality to [Western Mountaineering](#). [REI](#) and [Kelty](#) make some decent midrange bags that are sufficient for the casual backpacker and are more affordable. Kelty's 'Light Year' series are an affordable option, but their temperature ratings are a bit optimistic. REI has a couple of bags that are very good and somewhat affordable, such as their '**Halo**' series.

Shelter Suggestions

This is a gigantic category.

Tents: The best tent out there is [Stephensons Warmlite](#); however, they are extremely expensive.

Double-Wall tents have a conventional fly-over-body design. [REI](#) has some decent options, as does [Big Agnes](#) and [MSR](#). REI's 'Quarter Dome' series are a good value. MSR's 'Hubba' series tents are nice, though somewhat expensive. Also peruse the Big Agnes 'Seedhouse' line.

Single-Wall tents are made from sil-nylon and will be lighter (per sq. ft.) than a double wall. The downside is some condensation in damp or cooler weather, as well as sil-nylon tents being slightly less durable when treated roughly. Some single wall options are: [Tarptent](#), [Six Moon Designs](#), [Henry Shires](#), and [Golite](#). The first two single-wall brands are 'cottage' manufacturers; if you call to order one there's a good chance that you'll speak with the owner. Certain models of these tents may make use of your hiking pole(s) in setup, so that could reduce the weight you are carrying.

Hammocks: Some are now opting for lightweight hammocks instead of a tent. I have little experience with these, but those who use them seem quite fond of the concept. More information from [HikeArizona](#).

Mattress Suggestions

A sleeping mattress/pad offers not only comfort, but provides warmth from the cold ground.

I like a lot of padding, and recommend a [Big Agnes](#) Insulated Air Core, or, if you can find one, [a Pacific Outdoor](#) 'X-Lite Thermo'. These both have 3" of padding and roll up small when deflated.

For those who prefer less weight (and less padding) the [Thermarest](#) 'Prolite' series is a good choice.

A less comfortable choice is a closed cell pad. This is the lightest option, and they never go flat!

Socks / Shoes / Boots Suggestions

If you keep your pack weight to a minimum, regular day hiking shoes should suffice. In our temperate climate, good ventilation is key, big, clunky, all-leather boots are a recipe for blisters.

Never wear cotton socks while hiking/backpacking; Merino wool or a wool/synthetic blend is best.

KITCHEN / COOKING

Stove Suggestions

Most of the canister stoves are about the same. [MSR](#) 'Pocket Rocket' is likely the leader but [Brunton](#) and [Optimus](#) make similar products. [Jetboil](#) makes a new-fangled stove that some like, as does MSR's 'Reactor' stove, which is a canister stove with an added heat-exchanger for increased efficiency.

Some opt for alcohol stoves of varying designs. These do not simmer and are on or off, but are of extremely light weight, and can be [home made](#)!

Cooking / Food Container Suggestions

If you are willing to spend over \$50, you can opt for a **titanium** pot, or \$20/\$30 for aluminum pot.

But IMUSA (available in [Target's](#) pots/pans section) makes an aluminum 'grease pot' that is as good as most backpacking-specific pots and is about \$5. Walmart offers similar items.

Other options from Amazon are the 'Stanco' grease pot available (\$9.99) or Bene Casa pot.

A good insulated **mug** is [REI](#)'s Aladdin mug (\$4.25). They can be found elsewhere, even at Goodwill!

[REI](#) (and others) have small **stuffsacks** to organize things in your pack. Small bottles purchased or reused from items consumed at home can store spices, olive oil, sunscreen, toothpaste, etc.

Remember a **fork** and/or **spoon**. **Lexan** is the best option here.

Water Purification / Storage Suggestions

I use [Aquamira](#) (chlorine dioxide) drops when treating relatively clear water. This is available online or now at Sportsman's Warehouse.

For more brutal water conditions you can use a **water filter**.

The [MSR](#) Mini Works or [First Need's](#) filter are good bets that weigh under a pound and are field serviceable. MSR has a new 'Hyperflow' filter that is fast and just 7 oz. However, it is not field serviceable. Another good option is the small 'Frontier Pro' bottle-top filter from [Aquamira](#).

'Camelbak' type **bladders** are good, but sometimes can become damaged and leak. Experience shows having a separate bottle or two is a good idea.

Options for **base camp water storage** are available from [Platyus](#) and [MSR](#) dromedary bags.

Places to find high end used gear:

Fellow club members, [Craigslist](#), Buy/Sell used gear forums such as [WhiteBlaze](#), [Practically Backpacking](#), [Backpacking Lightweight](#), [Mountain Equipment Co-op](#), and [HikeAz](#).

Places to find high end discounted gear:

[Steep & Cheep](#), [REI-Outlet](#), Play it Again Sports, [Sierra Trading Post](#), [Campmor](#), and others. Just Google it. Also see the [Links](#) at [Friends Hiking Club](#).

Clothing Suggestions

Cotton is heavy to carry and does not dry quickly. Nylon is good and so is fleece, depending on the forecast. Down vests/jackets come in handy in cooler weather. A hat & gloves are also a good bet.

Wool or wool/synthetic (not cotton) socks are a must and lightweight booties/slippers, as well as clean socks make camp seem luxurious.

You should have at least a windbreaker if the forecast is clear and a rain jacket if not. I prefer to hike with an umbrella to avoid the inevitable 'clamminess' that a rain jacket will give you while hiking. Lightweight non-aluminum is best, especially in a thunderstorm!

Hygiene/General: Biodegradable liquid soap, alcohol cleanser, sample-size toothpaste, pack towel (synthetic material – sometimes goes by the brand name 'Pack Towel) sample-sized lotion, etc. Fingernail clipper, small knife, lip balm, duct tape, first aid items, headlamp (\$13.00 Target/Wal-Mart Energizer headlamps work just fine – Avoid the \$50.00 REI versions). Remember to have extra batteries just-in-case.

SUSTENANCE:

Backpacking Food Tips:

You will need more calories and salt/electrolytes than you consume normally.

Bring things that you have at least ***tried*** before the trip.

If you are hiking to a location with water availability, there's no use in carrying water within your food. But on some super-short backpacks, fresh food may be worth carrying.

Sometimes heat, altitude or fatigue will decrease or nearly eliminate your appetite. You need to eat ***anyway***, so bring something you can eat when you are not particularly hungry.

Breakfast Suggestions

Some are ok with just a Power Bar or the like. Others like a bagel with cream cheese or peanut butter, hot soups, etc. A good option is instant oatmeal or regular dry cereal with [Nido](#), a high fat powered milk. Pre-trip, measure both into a ziplock bag. Just add hot or cold water and eat!

Lunch Suggestions

I prefer to 'graze' while backpacking versus sitting down & having a 'meal' at lunch. Some items that I am fond of are: peanut butter, summer sausage, nuts, sesame sticks, tuna, cheese (sharp Vermont cheddar or swiss keeps well) crackers, bagels, dried fruit, and candy.

If you prefer a meal, tuna/chicken/ham salad packs are nice, as well as individual Spam packs.

Pita Bread, Bagels, Crackers, and Tortillas travel and keep better than bread (use tennis ball, Crystal Light or similar containers for storage).

In cooler weather, some fruits and vegetables keep well, like lettuce, radishes, celery, onion, apples, oranges, etc. Just watch the weight!

Dinner Suggestions

Some choose Mountain House/Backpackers Pantry/Natural High freeze dried meals. I personally prefer Lipton/Knorr 'Sides' and add freeze dried ground beef or chicken chunks to them, depending on which variety of 'Side' I choose. I sometimes use foil-pouch chicken, shrimp, oysters, tuna or salmon as well.

Couscous and instant mashed potatoes makes a good meal addition as well. You may also dry your own soups, sauces, fruits/vegetables at home for later rehydration on the trail. There are myriad items that can be found at ethnic markets, Sprouts, Whole Foods and even Safeway that are better and more nutritious than so-called 'backpacking food'. Remember to read all preparation instructions before packing to be certain you have all the affiliated prep items.

Check out a company named [Minimus](#) for small portions of condiments, peanut butter, cream cheese, hot sauce, etc. Also check out [TrailCooking.com](#) for great **freezer bag** cooking ideas. Just experiment and you will find something you like. Again, Google it!

Drinks: Crystal Light is lightweight but has no calories or electrolytes. PowerAde/Gatorade has electrolytes but is heavy in powdered form, but for some, it may be worth the weight. For adult beverages, it's your choice. Everclear offers the most 'kick' for the weight, and is good with Crystal Light!

Coffee / Other: Starbucks just introduced '[VIA](#)', an instant that is pretty good. There is also '[Java Juice](#)', Folgers Coffee 'bags', or regular instant. Nestle's [Nido](#) is powdered whole milk, available in the Hispanic section at Wal-Mart, Fry's, and elsewhere. Powdered Horchata is a welcome treat on the trail, too. Hot cocoa is also good when it's cool.