

SURVIVAL KIT - The TEN ESSENTIALS

By far, the best known outdoor equipment list is the so called list of Ten Essentials. The list was first suggested in the 1930s in an article which appeared in the newsletter of the Mountaineers, a Seattle-based outdoor club. Since then it has been reprinted in various forms and is used often by outdoor educators as a teaching tool. The original ten items, along with some comments, are listed below. Even though the Ten Essentials list is revered by many in the outdoor field, it shouldn't be taken as gospel. It is a good starting point, but you should add to the list depending on circumstances: where you are going and what you will be doing.

1. **MATCHES:** (Use "Strike-anywhere" matches.) Whatever you do, don't use "Strike-on-box matches." It is impossible to light "Strike-on-box" matches on anything other than the special striker strip on the box. If you don't have the match box or if the box gets wet, you are in big trouble. Be very careful when shopping for matches. It's easy to get the two different types of matches mixed up at the store. The boxes look the same. Always double-check and make sure you buy the right matches. Once you're sure that you have the right matches, place the matches in a waterproof case--small plastic waterproof match containers sold at sporting goods stores work fine--and include a striker. A piece of emery board makes a good striker. In very wet conditions, you'll want to have a dry striker along with your matches. When you need a fire, you don't want to mess around trying to light matches on wet rocks. Matches, which weigh nothing and easily fit in your pocket, are one of your most important survival tools. Some of the Flint Starters are also as good as matches, and the same rules apply. Not only does fire allow you to survive a cold, miserable night, but it is an important moral booster as well.

2. **FIRE STARTER:** (Always include fire starter with matches. Always!) There are times when even the best woodsman or woodswoman will not be able to make a fire without it. Fire starter assures that you can get fire going quickly, no matter how bad the conditions. Place some fire starter in your pack, but also put a small chunk of fire starter along with your matches and a striker in a waterproof case. Carry the case in your pocket. Never put your waterproof match case in your pack. If you do and if for some reason, you get separated from your pack, you're in trouble.

3. **MAP:** Many people who have been rescued could have easily gotten themselves out of trouble by simply having a good map along. Study some of the basics for Map reading so you can actually use the Map.

4. **COMPASS:** Even if you carry a GPS device, you still need a compass. Although, GPS units provide a reasonably accurate fix of your location, they do not always provide accurate bearings. If you know how to follow a compass bearing, you can guide yourself out of even thickly forested areas. Again, some knowledge and just a little advanced practice can make the difference when using this invaluable survival tool.

5. **FLASHLIGHT, EXTRA BATTERIES AND BULB:** A flashlight--or better yet, a headlight--is another one of those tools that is a simple and inexpensive insurance. Should night overtake you, it gives you the ability to find your way back to the trailhead, or assists greatly in keeping you alive in an unexpected overnight Camp.

6. **EXTRA FOOD:** Having extra food is critical in emergency situations. It helps ward off hypothermia in cold, wet weather, and it keeps you thinking clearly in a crisis.

7. **EXTRA CLOTHING:** Even if it's a sunny day and you're on a short day hike, you should carry at least a rain jacket. It keeps you dry and also serves as wind protection. A good hat (wool or pile) stocking hat is also high on the list of extra clothing since a large amount of body heat is lost through the head and neck area. When deciding what to take, stay away from cotton which is worthless when wet.

8. **SUNGLASSES:** Good sunglasses are particularly important when you are in snow country. Snow blindness can completely disable an individual.

9. **FIRST AID KIT:** Be prepared for emergencies. Carry basic first aid supplies such as sterile gauze and pads, bandaids, moleskin, etc. Make up a small First-Aid pack from studying the many guides available.

10. **POCKET KNIFE:** The multi purpose Swiss Army knife is ideal--you can make field repairs, shave branches to make kindling, punch holes to repair a tarp, cut nylon cord, etc. The ultra-mini knives are great for the car and city, but not functional in a survival setting. Although listed at number ten, that's not how important a good knife will be should you ever need it in a true survival situation.

OTHER ESSENTIALS: Possible additions to the Ten Essentials. The Ten Essentials' list has one glaring omission. It lacks the materials to build an emergency shelter. When all is considered, the best way of surviving wet, cold or snowy nights is to have some type of roof over your head and a dry floor under you. One of the best shelter options is a combination of a lightweight nylon poncho, nylon cord and a lightweight space blanket. The poncho can be tied to trees or placed over a rudimentary snow shelter to keep out wind and weather. Use a nylon poncho or tarp and avoid the plastic versions. The plastic versions rip easily and become brittle in cold weather. For a dry floor underneath you, a lightweight space blanket is a good choice. They are inexpensive, light, and aren't much larger than the size of a bar of soap. Since such lightweight space blankets can tear easily, they are best used as a floor and not depended upon as a tarp over your head.