

Winter camping tips: 23 things beginners should know

Many people think winter camping is something impossible or extreme. But in reality, as long as you have the right gear and plan ahead, it can be a fun way to get your friends together outside in the off-season.

The biggest thing about winter camping is to be prepared. If you're a beginner winter camper, choose a location that's easy to get to and plan a single night trip, so you can fine-tune your systems and have an easy out in case of anything unexpected.

Want to give it a try? Here are 23 things to keep in mind for your winter camping trip:

1. Start with a gear list – you don't want to forget anything, especially if it's something you need to keep warm.
2. Pack plenty of warm layers, including clean, dry layers to sleep in.
3. Avoid clothes made of cotton and go for synthetic or merino wool base layers instead. Wool is an excellent material that keeps you warm and traps heat, which makes it a great choice for damp conditions.
4. Wear waterproof boots that have soles with solid traction for snowy trails.
5. Hand and toe warmers are excellent ways to keep fingers and feet warm.
6. If you plan to make a fire, come prepared with fire starters, wood, paper and an extra lighter.
7. Make sure to bring enough wood – don't underestimate how cold it can get during the winter! Since winter is the off-season at many campgrounds, services can be limited in some parks so there may not be wood for sale. Some parks sell wood at their visitor centers since it's forbidden to gather wood in most parks.
8. If your campsite is far away from the parking area or trailhead, bring a sled to drag in your wood and supplies.
9. Dig a hole in the snow to help keep your fire from collapsing when the snow melts. Using a fire pan is a good alternative.
10. Use a foam pad under your inflatable sleeping pad for added warmth. It also doubles as a good seat that won't get soggy in the snow.
11. Depending on the expected temperatures, bring a sleeping bag rated for winter camping (-15°C to -40°C).
12. Use a sleeping bag liner in your sleeping bag for a bit of extra warmth.

13. Create your own hot water bottle by filling a Nalgene bottle with hot water and wrapping it in a piece of clothing.

16. Condensation and snow can make your tent and sleeping bag damp. When you get home from your trip, make sure to dry out all your gear very well before you pack it up. This prevents mildew and is good tent care.

13. Bring extra fuel, since you'll likely be melting snow for water. White gas stoves work better than propane in freezing cold temperatures.

14. Make sure you bring meals that are quick and easy to prepare (single pot options or just add hot water freeze-dried meals are good ideas). Cooking and cleaning up in mitts can be challenging!

15. Bring a small shovel to clear the snow for your tent site. Dig an area in the snow for your tent to help protect you from the wind. Packing down snow under your tent gives you an even sleeping surface, and you won't sink down into the snow at night.

16. Make sure you give yourself enough time to organize your campsite, since you'll be doing some snow shoveling. Start preparing your site at least an hour and a half before sunset so that you won't be caught in the dark.

17. Use a four-season tent.

18. Bring a tarp to cover anything that will remain outside at night in case it snows.

19. When you select your tent site, make sure you're not under any tree branches heavy with snow.

20. Don't forget lighting (lanterns, headlamps and candles are a must) and extra batteries.

21. If you want to keep your backpack light, bring water treatment and melt snow instead of packing in water.

22. All electronic equipment loses power faster in the cold. Try a portable power pack.

23. Bring camp chairs, blankets or your closed-foam pad so that you don't have to sit directly on the snow. It's the best way to avoid freezing your buns.