

Camping Equipment Suggestions

Sleeping Bag — A good night's sleep is essential. For winter camping outdoors, get a bag that is rated for zero degrees. Sleeping bags with synthetic fill can keep you warm when they get a little wet; wet down-filled bags can't keep you dry. Synthetic bags are bulkier than down but are a lot cheaper. The synthetic vs. down fill choice is yours. Mummy shape bags keep you warmer.

Sleeping Pad — Sleeping pads are recommended, both for comfort and warmth. There are closed-cell foam and self-inflating pads (open-cell foam pads wrapped in air-tight, waterproof nylon shells; e.g., Thermo-Rest), depending upon how much that you want to spend. The closed-cell pads are less expensive but bulkier, while the self-inflating pads are more compact but expensive. For winter camping, full-length pads are best because they offer insulation for your legs and feet.

Backpack — There are two basic types of backpacks: internal frames and external frames. Internal frame designs are by far the most popular. Internals use hidden metal or composite frames, are tall and narrow, hug your back, and have lots of pockets and straps for flexibility. External-frame packs use a rigid frame made of aluminum tubing and are well suited for attaching gear in the correct locations on the outside of a pack. The external frame suspension allows air to circulate between your back and the pack, an advantage in the summer. Externals are a little less expensive than internals. Regardless of which pack you choose, it's critical to get one that properly fits. Get assistance from someone at EMS to get the correct size (you can take their advice but purchase online or elsewhere). The hip strap should fit snugly, transferring most of the pack's weight to the legs. You don't need an expensive backpack to get started.

Boots — Boots with ankle support are important when hiking on New England's rugged trails. They should also be waterproof and have lug soles. You don't have to spend a lot of money if your Scout is younger. You can find reasonably priced boots at Mickey Finn's and many of the large sporting goods stores.

Water Bottle — Scouts should have at least one 32-oz. (1 liter) water bottle for hiking; two bottles are better. Nalgene is a dependable brand.

Mess Kit — Scouts need a deep plate or bowl, a fork, spoon or spork, and a cup. Either Lexan (strong plastic) or metal work fine.

Flashlight — Strap a headlamp around your head and you've got both hands available to setup a tent in the dark, tend the campfire, or rummage around in your backpack. There are two basic types of headlamps: traditional incandescent bulbs and LED bulbs. LED headlamps are very bright and lightweight but are much more expensive than incandescent.

Rain Gear — Rain gear is an essential item for every Scout's backpack. It doesn't need to be an expensive item; a simple one-piece poncho is just fine. The alternative is a rain jacket with rain pants. If a Scout wears just a rain jacket, water can run off the jacket and soak his pants, which can make the Scout miserable even in fairly warm weather. In addition, the rain jacket won't keep a pack dry while a poncho is usually large enough to cover a pack, too. Water-proof pack covers should be used while backpacking and wearing a rain jacket.

Clothing — When buying clothing for camping, think "layers." Inner layers wick sweat away from your skin and provide an extra layer of insulation (synthetics such as polypropylene are good); mid-layer clothing will provide basic insulation (fleece or wool); and outer layers protect you from the wind, rain and snow (water-resistant or water-proof shells). Fleece is comfortable, warm (even when wet), fast drying and lightweight (half as heavy as wool). Cotton takes a long time to dry and is an ineffective insulator ("cotton is rotten").

Tents — The Troop provides all Scouts with four-season tents which must be used by the junior patrols and may be used by Senior Scouts (high school aged). Only the oldest Scouts might want to consider having their own tents for Scout camping trips.