

HOW TO SELECT A CAMPSITE FOR NEW CAMPERS

Selecting a good campsite can make or break your camping trip. Flooded tents, falling trees, and noisy neighbors can spoil a trip, but can be avoided with some preparation and planning. Whether you're pitching a tent or cowboy camping under the stars, there are some things to consider when selecting a good campsite. Please note that before camping with Cub Scouts, a registered adult leader camping with the pack must have completed BALOO training. When camping with a troop (Scouts BSA), Into to Outdoor Leadership Skills (IOLS) must be completed.

1. Look for Level Ground

While this may not be important for Scouts using hammocks*, everyone else is going to want to find an area that is mostly level to set their shelter. If you can't find a spot that is perfectly level, start to think about how you'd like to sleep while sloping. For some, after a long day of hiking having feet elevated to allow for any swelling to go down can help. For others (especially if allergies are kicking in), having your head elevated can help with night time stuffiness.

2. Check Your Campsite's Drainage

If you're in a vehicle or hammock this may not be as critical, but if you're in a tent or cowboy camping be sure you pay attention to drainage. Is the surrounding area sloping towards your campsite? If there is precipitation in the middle of the night, the last thing you are going to want to do is get out of your warm, cozy sleeping bag and move your tent because of flooding. This can be tricky if you are on a tent pad. If there is precipitation in the forecast, digging a moat or canal away from your tent can help. Before you start any digging, check with campmaster, ranger, or camp director.

3. Choose Your Door Orientation

Whatever your shelter type, if you're in an area near other campers it makes sense to pay attention to the direction your doors face. When tent camping, it is advised that adults face their tent door towards the Scouts' tent doors, so they can check on them and keep an eye on things.

4. Make the Most of Sun and Shade

During colder weather, pay attention to where the sun will rise and try to orient your tent to be bathed in sunlight as early as possible to help warm you in the morning. In the height of summer, look for more trees and rock outcroppings that will provide shade and shadows earlier from the setting sun.

5. Check Your Proximity High Traffic Areas

Especially in established campgrounds, be aware of the location of high-traffic areas, such as bathrooms and water sites. The last thing you want is to hear the door to the bathrooms opening and closing all night long.

6. Check for Unhealthy Trees

Pay close attention to the health of trees around and above your prospective site. Wind storms and unhealthy or dead trees can spell disaster for any camping trip. Scouts using hammock need to find strong healthy trees or other sturdy support to utilize before they can safely set up.

7. Check for Overhead Electrical Wires

Even the slightest contact with electrical wires overhead can be deadly. Before you set up, look up!

8. Watch for Sharp Objects

Clear sharp debris (rocks, pinecones, etc.) from under your tent footprint prior to setting up your tent to decrease the chance for discomfort or punctures of sleep pads.

9. Remember the 200 Foot Rule for Campsites

If you're at a dispersed site (not an established campground), be sure to follow the 200 foot rules. Set up camp more than 200 feet away from the water's edge (lakes, ponds, rivers, etc.) to prevent any ecological impacts on the area, as well as 200 feet from any trail to prevent hikers from wandering into your campsite at night. It's also a good rule of thumb to have your tent 200 feet from where you do your dishes, use the toilet, and store your food.

10. Remember to Leave No Trace

A Scout is clean in their outdoor manners. Scouts promise to treat the outdoors as a heritage, so we must minimize the impact we have on the land. Choose an existing camp location whenever possible, and at the minimum, camp on a durable surface instead of fragile areas. Always clean up your trash, don't cut the vegetation, and leave what you find. If you are not yet familiar with all the Leave No Trace Seven Principles/Outdoor Ethics, please review them in your Scout Handbook or online at [Outdoor Ethics | Boy Scouts of America \(scouting.org\)](https://www.scouting.org/outdoor-ethics/) before you head out.

These 10 tips should help you pick a good campsite to call home in the great outdoors. Remember to always follow the advice of the campmasters, local rangers, and area experts on wildlife precautions. Get out there and have fun!

**Hammocks should be no more than 1.5 to 3 feet off the ground, depending on the type and manufacturer warnings. This also means that hanging hammocks on top of one another is out as well. This also means no hammock stacking.*