

What You Really Need to Know Before You Go Camping

- 1. Make an equipment checklist.** It's impossible to keep everything in your head, so write it down. Lay your gear out in piles at home and check things off as you pack the car.
- 2. Buy high-quality, i.e. comfortable, sleep pads.** You may think your kids won't know the difference between the more expensive and the thinner ones, but they may not wind up sleeping on them, either!!
- 3. Get a first-aid kit.** This should be high on your equipment list. A good first aid kit includes basic instructions. Cuts and bruises are common camp injuries, so antibiotic ointment and bandages are essential. So are treatments for headaches and sore muscles.
- 4. Check the weather.** Do this before you leave; the forecast could your equipment list, and you want to be prepared. If you can't find a report for your campground, find the daytime temperature of the nearest town and plan on a drop of about 5 degrees for every 1,000-foot gain in elevation.
- 5. Pack the gear.** Unroll sleep pads and lay them down in the trunk to cushion fragile items from bumps. Pack the tent last so you can get it out first when you arrive in camp (typically, just as darkness is setting in).
- 6. Take a trial run.** If you're going with friends you've never camped with before, try a short trip before committing to a long vacation. The close quarters in camp can cause personality clashes that make a long trip, even with people you thought were your friends, seem endless.
- 7. Pack for the kids.** Let each child pack one box or duffel bag or you agree upon full of toys. Then add coloring books, crayons, cards, and anything else that you know he or she will really want but has overlooked.
- 8. Scour your site.** At the campground, look around for sharp objects left by previous occupants-- fishhooks, jagged can tops, and the like. The idea is to find them before your kids do.
- 9. Don't feed the wildlife.** Keep the campground spotless or you'll invite nocturnal visitors.
- 10. Relax:** you're on vacation. Keep in mind the following: The best days are the ones not over planned; decide to do only one major thing a day.
- 11. Make a final check.** Before leaving, send everyone on a sweep of the campsite to look for trash and equipment; it's easy to leave tent stakes and poles behind.