

# Choosing a Tent Site

Choosing a tent site used to be as easy as finding an open spot large enough to pitch the tent, and possibly the dining tarp. Now, with public lands switching more to Leave-No-Trace principles, over-development of our shrinking natural resources, and more of a desire with Scouts to visit Wilderness areas, we need to give more thought into where to 'pitch' that tent. The guidelines below are meant to help you, and your Troop, selecting a safe place for your tents.

1. **Choose even surfaces.** It might surprise you to learn that the most comfortable sleeping spot isn't a soft meadow (which can be bumpy, wet, and mosquito-infested). Instead, look for forest duff or pine needles or even mineral soil, sand, or gravel. On a mattress, you'll find that it's more comfortable to be camped on a hard flat surface than a soft, bumpy one.
2. **Spend a little time.** Sometimes it's hard to find a flat spot. The ground might be too rocky or hummocky or densely vegetated. Once you've spotted a possible home for the night, lay out your groundcloth and lie down to check out the slope and whether there are big protruding rocks that will poke you all night long.
3. **Look for overhead dangers.** These include the possibility of rock-fall from a scree-slope and widow-makers (dead trees that have started to fall but are held in place by other trees).
4. **Drainage.** Choose sites that will drain well, even in a downpour. This means avoiding flat areas that lie in slight depressions or especially on non-porous hard-packed soil. In dry country, avoid flash-flood zones, like the sandy creekbed of a canyon.
5. **Bug-free sleep.** Mosquitoes are worst on a warm, humid night, especially if there is no breeze. Heading for an exposed knoll or a wind tunnel (look for a saddle between two hills) might find you a breezy spot.
6. **Windy nights.** On very windy nights, you'll want your wind at the back of your tent. If possible, hide in a clump of bushes, behind a rock redoubt. When storms threaten, give up comfort for protection or choose a protected spot over a flat one. Batten down. A calm evening can become a windy night. Set up your tent right the first time, with firmly planted stakes and taut guylines. When the weather changes at 2 A.M., you can roll over and go back to sleep, rather than having to get up and fix things.
7. **Campsites and water.** Be sure that your campsite is at least 200 feet from water to prevent inadvertently contaminating the water or scaring wildlife away from their nightly drink. Also, avoid game trails: animals might not be willing to approach a campsite, and that could mean they'll go thirsty if you are camped between them and the water they depend on.
8. **Avoid fragile areas.** Don't camp on meadows, especially in alpine areas, where several years of growth can be destroyed by the stomp of a Vibram sole.
9. **Use established sites when possible.** It's more aesthetically pleasing to come to a lake with ten or twelve heavily used sites than it is to come to a similar lake with signs of a hundred different sites scattered every which way, sometimes only a few yards from each other.
10. **Practice leave-no-trace.** When camping in pristine areas, try to remove all traces of your camp. so that the next party that comes through sees no evidence of your site.
11. **Campshoes.** Once you choose a campsite, change into campshoes right away. It's easier on your feet and on the earth. DON'T go barefoot.
12. **Avoid making fires.** In fragile country or alpine areas, deserts, and the like, avoid making fires entirely. They leave scars and remove wood that is used for shelter by animals. In forests, fires are okay in areas of abundant downed wood. Use only dead, downed wood, and always use existing fire rings. Making a new fire ring creates an impact that may last for generations.