



Brother Riad's Guide for Camping in the Rain

Proper Clothing

Cotton clothing will make you clammy and uncomfortable in the rain. Lightweight nylon clothing and synthetic underwear in the summer – wool or polypropylene layers in the winter will keep you both safe and comfortable. If things go from bad to worse layering on your rain gear will keep you warm enough to sleep even if your tent and sleeping bag are wet. As I tell our Scouts being warm and wet is okay, being wet and cold is unacceptable. A *good quality* rain jacket and pants are very helpful! Some folks like ponchos but, especially for Scouts, it is harder to stay dry while active. It is hard to keep dry in a poncho compared to a rain jacket and pants. However bring something, anything is better than nothing.

Bring a Lot of Plastic Bags

The wonderful things about plastic bags of all sizes—trash bags, sealing sandwich bags and so forth—are that they keep water out just as effectively as higher end dry bags. They take up virtually no room in your pack and cost next to nothing. You can't reuse them like you can the brand name camping dry bags, but for a single trip, cheap plastic bags are a saving grace if you end up camping in the rain. Always carry a trash bag to cover your hiking pack at night, and one to store dry firewood.

I pack all my gear and clothing in various sizes of plastic bags (heavy zip-locks or clear recycling trash bags). My back pack is waterproof too. Everything I pack has at least two layers of waterproofing between gear and the elements.

Take the Tarp Inside

Tent ground tarps, as the name implies, are placed directly on the dirt and beneath your tent. They're an extra sheet of protection and barrier against water and morning dew. They come in all sorts of plastic and nylon styles and are usually cheap. In fact, the classic woven polyurethane style tarps from a hardware store work just fine and generally run about \$30. Place a ground tarp inside your tent rather than outside; you'll find it provides a much better water barrier this way.

Collect the Water

Camping in the rain doesn't have to be all bad; if it rains, seize the opportunity to collect some of it for drinking water. Put your open water bottle out to catch the drops, or setup a stretched tarp to funnel water into your bottle or cooking pot. You want to collect water directly as it falls; don't use any water that has slid down a tree, dripped from branches or touched rocks. It's never a bad idea to filter your water before you drink it, even rain water.

Keep the Coals Hot

It's easy to focus on the storm, but keep in mind it will soon pass and you'll be back to some of the basics of camping—making a fire, cooking food and relaxing. Be sure you store some firewood in a spot where it's protected from the rain so getting back to normal camp life is stress-free.

Be Smart About Lightning

This is one of the most dangerous aspects of camping in the rain. Lightning can strike before, during and after the main thunder clouds have passed overhead. If you're swimming or in a boat, get out of the water immediately. If you're on land, find a spot that's not on or near the highest geographical point. Additionally, don't hunker down beneath large branches that could break and fall during a storm. Keep in mind that storms can be extremely frightening for children, so if you're camping with kids, plan ahead with topics that will keep your kids calm during dangerous weather.

Recognize the Signs of Hypothermia

Hypothermia, the sudden and extreme lowering of your body's core temperature, isn't a condition that's confined to snow-covered landscapes and remote, icy tundra. In fact, simply staying wet from the rain can put you at risk of getting hypothermia. If your body's temperature dips below 95-degrees you're in serious trouble. Usually other symptoms such as slurred speech, impaired judgment, frostbite, shivers and pale or purple-tinged skin will also be present. Ideally, someone with hypothermia should be rushed to a hospital. In the meantime, or if the hospital isn't a realistic option, remove all the wet clothing and cover the person in dry clothes, blankets and sleeping bags. Keep them warm and calm and continue to monitor their temperature. If you think you might be camping in the rain, and choose to go anyway, be sure to locate a near-by medical center, just in case.

Watch the Rocks

If you plan a backpacking trip, camping in the rain is much more dangerous. Any rocky terrain immediately becomes more dangerous and precarious during—and immediately following—the rain. Wet rocks are hazardously slick or loose, and mosses and grasses add to the danger. If you have to hike on steep, rocky inclines, ask yourself if it's worth the risk; it might be wiser to camp for the night and wait to hike when everything dries. At the very least, minimize your chances for injury by wearing closed-toe shoes with ample ankle support and grip surface on the soles. Hiking sticks aren't a bad idea either. And make sure all the weight is evenly distributed in your pack to aid in your balance and traction.

Air Out Your Wet Stuff

If you've endured a storm during your trip, you likely packed up your gear while it was still a little wet. From clothing to shoes and tents, it's important that you unpack this stuff immediately following the trip to let it fully dry. Otherwise, molds, mildew and other mysterious scents will develop and ruin all of the fabric, and rust will corrode metal items like tent parts, saws and utensils.

