

What to do if you get lost in the woods

Getting lost while out on a hike is a surprisingly frequent occurrence. This is particularly true for new and inexperienced hikers. In most cases you will be able to find your way back out of the woods on your own. Sometimes getting lost can lead to potentially life-threatening situations, particularly in winter. Getting lost can also be a very frightening experience. Below are a few tips to follow in case you find that you are lost.

1. First, try to avoid getting lost in the first place. Stay to trails. It's possible to lose a trail, even if you only step off of it by thirty feet. This is particularly true in dense woods. Take a map if you have one. Let someone know where you will be going and what time you should be expected back.
2. If you find you've wandered off the path, stop immediately. In most cases, you will find that retracing your footsteps will bring you back to the trail.
3. If you can't locate a familiar trail stop and assess the situation. Try to stay calm. This is perhaps the most important thing to remember: If you don't stay calm, you can't think straight. If you can't think straight, you won't be able to help yourself.
4. Orient yourself. If you have no map or compass, you can still get a general idea of your location. Remember: the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
5. If you still can't find the trail, follow a river or stream downstream. You will eventually come to house or a road.
6. Look for any familiar landmarks in the area, such as a distinctive mountain summit. This can help orient yourself so you can make your way out.
7. If nightfall approaches and you don't know where you are, it is usually wiser to stay put and try to find your way out in the daylight. Wandering around in the dark greatly increases your chances of getting injured.
8. If you have a whistle, blow it periodically. The sound may attract help. The sound from a whistle travels farther and is more easily located than the sound of a shout.