

Backpacking Gear List

By: Daniel Burnette

Note: The lighter the weight, the more expensive quality gear will be.

Pack: You really shouldn't choose your pack without some knowledge about your other gear and how much space you'll need for it. You want to have enough space for all your stuff, but not a bunch of unused space the results in more weight on your back. Key things to look for in a pack are strap adjustability, hip strap adjustability, and lots of pockets. I personally use an Osprey Atmos 65 liter pack. Some folks might be able to use a 50 liter or smaller pack.

Tent: A note from a bigger framed person: Never try to use a 1-person tent, you won't have enough room. Get a 2-person tent so you have enough room to be comfortable. You either use a tent that comes with its own support poles, or one that requires the use of a pair of trekking poles. I personally use a Lunar Duo Explorer, which uses trekking poles. It's a more expensive tent, but it is very lightweight. I have also used a Kelty Discovery 1 person tent, which was a quality tent, but was also the reason for my suggestion against 1 person tents.

Sleeping Bag: A note from a bigger framed person: Get a bigger sleeping bag than you think you need. You need room to move in your sleeping bag. Sleeping bags are typically size and "long", "wide", or both "long and wide", with the specifics of those sizes varying between manufacturers. I use an REI COOP Magma 30 degree tent, sized at "Long and Wide". I have also used a Kelty Discovery 30 degree, which I bought in too small of a size and was a bit restrictive for me.

Sleeping Pad: The main concern of a sleeping pad will be insulation rating, or "R" rating. While comfort is also a concern, it's not typically an issue removed from the insulation rating. Since the sleeping bag will be on the cold ground, you need it to insulate you from the cold ground. Look for the "R" rating to determine the insulation rating. I use a Nemo Tensor Alpine sleeping pad. I have also used a couple different off brand pads from Amazon to not so great results.

Food preparation equipment: There are several options available for this piece of gear. I use a Jetboil Stash system, which has the pot, burner, fuel can, lighter, and foldable spork all encased in the pot. You could also use an alcohol stove, or a miniature wood burning stove. Note: some trail systems do not allow wood burning stoves because you can't put the fire out immediately, causing fire concerns.

Water Filtration: There are several options for this piece of gear as well. I personally use a Sawyer Mini Squeeze filter, with not extra attachments. The Sawyer filters are all designed to screw onto a standard bottle cap, like Coke or Pepsi bottles. I usually carry a 2 liter bottle for clean water storage, and use a 20 oz Pepsi bottle for dirty water. There are gravity filters, life straws, tablets, and others for different styles of water filtration. Remember, you'll need to be able to filter as many as 6 liters of water in 1 day, which takes a decent amount of time depending on the type of filtration. A Squeeze filter like the Sawyers is one of the faster methods, and is also one of the cheaper and more easily available options. You can usually find Sawyer filters at Wal Mart in the camping section.

Footwear: Obviously, footwear can be a bit subjective. Some folks will opt for very light weight trail runners (tennis shoes with extra tread). I use Timberland 6" hiking boots. Some folks will use heavier hunting style boots. Waterproofing is not necessary, though preferred in certain weather and temperatures. Most thru hikers don't bother with using waterproof footwear. I have found that heavier boots are not a great idea, especially when going for longer mileage days (10+ miles).

Clothing: Bright colors are great, for a couple reasons. #1: If you're hiking during any kind of hunting season, you want to be easily identifiable as not an animal. #2: It will help other hikers find you on trail if anything goes wrong. Remember that you will be keeping yourself warm while moving, even at temps a little below freezing. Once you stop for breaks or to camp for the night, you will cool down quickly and want to layer up. It's a good idea to err on the side of lighter weight clothing, while still making sure to bring enough to stay relatively warm outside of your sleeping bag. For a trip less than 1 week, I typically bring 1 t-shirt, 1 hooded sweatshirt, 1 pair of sweatpants, 1 extra pair of wool socks, 1 extra pair of underwear, and a "puffy jacket", which is made with goose down and light enough to not add a bunch of extra weight for a good amount of insulation. The puffy jacket will have a similar feel on the outside compared to your sleeping bag.

Cell phone charging: Solar chargers do not work on East Coast trails, too much tree cover, like the Appalachian Trail. You'll need a battery bank, like an Anker 10000mAh battery bank. You can get them at any electronic store like Best Buy or Wal-Mart.

Food: You will burn a lot more calories on trail than you expect. A minimum for 1 day is 3000 calories. Bring more than that. An example of 1 day of food would be: 2 packs of ramen, 1 box of mac and cheese, 4 granola bars, 1 backpacker meal, and 1 pack of pop tarts. Notice that the food is all shelf stable, and easily cooked in small pots that you would have in a backpacker cooking kit. You may also want to have some type of jerky to throw into your cooked pasta while its cooking to soften it.

Knife: Bring a small pocket knife. It doesn't have to be huge. It can be as simple as a folding box cutter. I carry a small Gerber folding knife.

Food Storage: Some section of the AT require that you use a Bear Canister for food storage. Bear Canisters are large, heavy duty plastic containers that a bear can't get into. The old school method is to hang your food at night, which can be tricky at many campsites. You need a branch high enough off the ground to keep a bear from being able to get it from the ground, and far enough from the tree trunk to prevent the bear from getting it from the trunk. The branch also needs to be small enough to not support the weight of the bear. There are bags available that a bear can't get into, such as the Ursack bags. Many shelters on the AT will have bear boxes, metal boxes with hinges designed to keep bears out. The best method is to choose a shelter or campsite that has a bear box. A rule that everyone should follow is to never sleep with your food. You should also hang up your pack at night, especially in AT shelters, to keep the mice out of it.