



Earth Gauge

A National Environmental Education Foundation Program

Great American Backyard Campout

Saturday, June 27, 2009 is the National Wildlife Federation's **Great American Backyard Campout**, held in support of Great Outdoors Month. Every summer, this event encourages Americans to spend a night camping outdoors with their families - in state parks, national parks or even their own backyards. Below, find tips on where to camp and what to bring. Also find tips for camping safety and **Lightning Safety Week**, June 21-27, 2009.

Find more information about the Campout, register and post photos at www.nwf.org/BackyardCampout/index.cfm.

WHERE TO CAMP

There are many places to camp around you – national parks, state parks, other local campgrounds and even your own backyard. The National Wildlife Federation's *Nature Find* tool, www.nwf.org/naturefind, can direct you to natural areas near your home. If you are camping with a large group of people, choose a location such as a campground that can accommodate more people.

Many people camp using a tent, but other options include under a tarp or lean-to, a camper or a cabin. If you chose a tent, tarp or lean-to, make sure that you pick a site on flat ground, away from rocks, brush, tall trees and tall metal poles. Avoid campsites that lie in tall grass (to avoid ticks) or are immediately next to streams and rivers or in low-lying areas (to avoid flooding). Visit the *Learn How to Pitch a Tent* guide (www.nwf.org/BackyardCampout/pitchtent.cfm) for more tips on setting up your campsite.



Photo by David Restivo, National Park Service

WHAT TO BRING

For a one-night campout, your supplies should include food for dinner, breakfast and snacks, camping equipment, weather-appropriate clothing and items for activities like games, reading and hiking. Outdoor supply stores usually rent camping equipment if you do not have your own. During every outdoor experience, it is always a good idea to have safety and first-aid materials with you.

If you are camping in your backyard...

- Tent or tarp hung by clothesline with rocks to secure the ends
- Rain fly or extra tarp to protect tent from rain
- Sleeping bag (or a sheet and blankets) and small pillow
- Camping pad, air mattress or extra blankets to sleep on
- Clothing appropriate for the weather
- Flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries
- Bug spray
- Drinking water
- Lantern with extra batteries or fuel
- A tarp to lay on the ground under the tent for insulation, folded to fit directly under tent with no edges exposed
- Games, activities or books (optional)
- Camera or video recorder (optional)
- A portable radio or music player (optional)
- Firewood (optional)
- Ingredients for S'mores: graham crackers, marshmallows and chocolate bars (optional)

At a campsite, bring these additional items...

- Basic first-aid kit
- Personal items: toothbrush, toothpaste, toilet paper, prescription medications, etc.
- Extra tent stakes
- Rope or twine
- Portable cooking stove or charcoal if your campsite has a grill
- Kindling or newspaper for starting campfires
- Matches (in a waterproof container)
- Camping pot or inexpensive, small metal pot
- Potholder or oven mitt for handling pots
- Plate or bowl, plastic or metal cup and silverware for each person
- Jugs of water for drinking and cleaning
- Biodegradable soap for cleaning
- Small bucket for washing dishes
- Small dish rag or towel
- Cooler with ice for water and refrigerated items
- Rain gear and extra layers of clothing in case of cold weather

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Knowledge to live by



Other items you may want to bring...

- Sturdy shoes for walking
- Backpack
- Water bottle
- Extra first-aid supplies
- Sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat
- Pocket knife (secured away from children)
- A map and compass, especially if you are camping beyond your backyard
- Small musical instruments
- Field guides to local wildlife, plants, weather or the night sky
- A notebook and pen for recording what you find

Also check out the Backyard Campout Packing Checklist: www.nwf.org/BackyardCampout/packinglist.cfm

LEAVE NO TRACE®

Keeping your campsite clean and pristine will allow you and others to enjoy it again in the future. Follow the principles of Leave No Trace ethics: plan ahead and prepare; travel and camp on durable surfaces; dispose of waste properly; leave what you find; minimize campfire impacts; respect wildlife; and be considerate of other visitors. To learn more about Leave No Trace, visit www.lnt.org.

STAYING SAFE

Being prepared and playing it safe can help you have a more enjoyable camping experience. Always tell someone who is not camping with you about your camping trip – where you're going and how long you're staying. Make a plan with your campers on where to meet in case of an emergency.

Dangerous Plants and Animals: You might want to bring a field guide to familiarize yourself with poisonous snakes and plants that live in your camping area. In addition, ticks can carry diseases, but you can take measures to reduce your exposure to them: avoid tick habitat (tall grass and brush); stay on trails; wear light-colored, long-sleeved shirts and pants with socks and boots; tuck your shirt into your pants; and use bug-spray as directed when near tick habitat.

Campfire Safety: Before starting a fire, always check for burn bans in your area and make sure campfires are allowed. Most campgrounds have designated fire rings or pits. If you camp in your backyard and want to create a fire ring or pit, clear an area away from the house, trees, debris and other flammable objects. Campfires should be kept small and never left unattended. Use only dead wood found on the ground or purchased firewood, not live branches. To put out the fire, pour water on it, stir and add more water until all the coals are extinguished.



Weather: Always check the weather forecast for your camping area before you go. Weather can be unpredictable – bring rain gear, extra clothing and an extra tarp in case of rain or cold. Avoid camping in low-lying areas that could flood and next to tall objects like trees and telephone poles, which are more likely to get struck by lightning.

Lightning Safety Week is June 21-27, 2009. The National Weather Service gives these safety tips for campers:

- There is NO safe place to be outside in a thunderstorm. If you see threatening skies, see lightning or hear thunder, go inside a safe building – one with a roof, electrical wires and plumbing. Tents and picnic shelters are NOT safe places.
- If there is no shelter nearby, round up your family and go to your vehicle. Roll up the windows. The metal frame of the vehicle will conduct electricity to the ground if it is hit, keeping you safe inside. It is best to remain in your vehicle for 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder is heard.
- If you absolutely cannot find shelter during a thunderstorm, you should squat out in the open in a low-lying area on the tips of your toes in a “crouch” position, away from other members of your group (electricity can be conducted from one person to another) and away from tall isolated objects and metal. Do not lie down, since electrical currents can travel along the ground.

When you are outside, watch for signs of approaching storms and listen for thunder. Protect yourself from lightning by remembering the *30/30 rule*: if you are outside, seek shelter if the “flash-to-bang” delay (the time between lightning and thunder) is less than 30 seconds, and stay inside until at least 30 minutes after the storm is over.

For more information on lightning safety, visit www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.