

What should I get for my son to start camping with the Troop?



The leaders of the troop are often asked that, and other related questions. This information sheet will try to give you some idea of what to buy, where to buy it, and (in some cases) what not to buy. Listing a merchant or company here is not an endorsement of that business, but just an informational listing. The troop has a good supply of equipment thanks to our Car Wash fundraisers and trying to make the camping fees cover the actual costs. As such, **the Troop provides tents, stoves, pots, lanterns, and other community gear**. The rest is up to you.

In our area there are a few shops that specialize in camping equipment. Camp Coleman (they have been offering a discount if you show your Scout card) in the Tangier Outlets, Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS) in the Smith Haven Mall, and The Sports Authority across from the Smith Haven Mall. Other stores carry camping equipment but their selection is often limited. Campmor is a mail order company with an extensive inventory of quality discounted camping equipment. If you don't get their catalog, call 1-800-CAMPMOR to get on their mailing list. Both Campmor and EMS have web sites for on-line ordering and sometimes offer web discounts not available otherwise. Go to www.campmor.com and www.ems.com for their sites. Both web sites offer advice and information about using their products. Another good source of information is [Backpacker Magazine](#) (available in the North Shore Public Library). Their annual "Gear Issue" discusses what to look for in quality backpacking and camping gear.



Footwear. A pair of good, waterproof hiking boots is essential. Buy them **now**; don't wait until the day before a camp out. They need to be broken in, and you need to make sure they are comfortable. Use wool socks with polypropylene liners to keep your feet dry and comfortable. Even in the summer this will keep your feet happy, dry and surprisingly cool.

Clothing. Avoid cotton! Although comfortable when dry, once wet cotton dries slowly and keeps you cold by using your body heat to dry itself. There are many "wicking" fabrics that remove perspiration and moisture from your body to the surface where it evaporates. These fabrics are usually quick drying. Pants, shorts and shirts are available. A wool or wool blend flannel shirt is good for the winter. Light or mid-weight long underwear is good for winter and early spring or late fall camp outs. Remember, we camp almost every month! A polyester fleece (such as Polartec) provides a warm and lightweight-layering garment. Of course gloves and a hat (wool or Polartec) are essential for winter months and are advisable in the spring and fall, especially for upstate campouts. As the saying goes: "if your feet are cold, put on a hat".



Rain Gear. Two-piece rain gear is the best type. Prices and quality vary considerably, as does weight and bulk. Don't buy gear made of the old style rubberized or stiff PVC coated materials. Look for the words: "waterproof", "breathable", and "taped seams". Without the breathable fabric, you may get wetter from your sweat than you would from the rain.

Eating. Don't buy the stacked pots and eating utensils. Most of us use a cheap plastic bowl. If we lose it, it's no big deal. A plastic bowl with a sealable lid (like Tupperware or Glad disposables) is also good. The only eating tool you need is a spoon. Any time you need a fork, your fingers will work even better. For drinking, get a cheap plastic cup. For water you need to carry *at least 2* one-quart water bottles. Get the screw top bottles with volume markings on the side. This is very useful for measuring water for cooking dehydrated food. Don't buy canteens that hang from a shoulder strap. These will bang against you all along the trail and soon become very annoying. You should remember that the water in one of your bottles will often be "community" water and will be needed for cooking when you reach the campsite. So don't add drink mix to, or drink directly from, any community water bottle. It is the opinion of many adult leaders that you should never add drink mixes to your water bottles; that's what the cheap cup is for. It encourages bacteria and mold growth and makes that water bottle unusable for cooking. If re-hydrated beef stew was supposed to taste like Gator-Aid, they'd make it that way.

Sleeping Bag Bags are rated by temperature range. A 20- or 25-degree rating is adequate for most of the camping that we do. For colder weather, add a blanket or a fleece liner for more comfort. Buy one that fits (get into it in the store) and has a polyester fill. Down fill is too expensive and care intensive when you are just starting out. Also pay attention to the weight of the bag. On a recent backpacking trip, I noticed that a couple of boys had new bags that were rated 20-degrees, the same as mine, but weighed 9 pounds. Mine weighs just over 3 pounds. My sleeping bag and tent together weighed less than their sleeping bag! Most bags come with a stuff sack. **Do not store your bag in the stuff sack!** Long-term storage in a stuff sack will reduce the insulating power of the sleeping bag by permanently compressing the fill. Also buy a waterproof stuff sack for your bag. The stuff sack that comes with the bag is not waterproof, no matter what the manufacturer says. If you drop your bag out of the canoe, the sack better not leak. Outdoor Research makes an "Advanced Hydroseal Stuff Sack" that many of us have purchased and none have leaked. **Do not store your bag in the stuff sack!**

Sleeping Pad. A sleeping pad is used to make the ground under you less lumpy and to provide insulation from the cold ground. There are many styles and types with a wide range of prices. They come in $\frac{3}{4}$ and full lengths. The $\frac{3}{4}$ sizes are lighter, but don't provide insulation for your feet. On the other hand there is always something around that can go under your feet. The considerations are weight and thickness.



Backpack. One of my favorite activities with the troop is backpacking, but it's not for everyone. Packs can cost over \$200 (easily), so be sure you enjoy backpacking before investing in an expensive pack. A "beginner" pack might cost only \$30, and last only a year or two. By then you will know if you like backpacking, and will have outgrown the beginner pack anyway. The correct fit is necessary for a backpack, just like any other piece of equipment. They come in different frame and belt sizes, and better backpacks include some adjustability. To determine the correct frame size, measure from the big bump where your shoulder meets the neck, along your backbone to a point horizontal with the top of your hipbones. Measurements of 14" - 16" = x-small; 16" - 18" = small; 18" - 20" = medium; over 20" = large. Also

check belt size. The hip belt should be padded and when cinched tight, the pads should cover the front of your hipbones. I won't get into the internal versus external frame argument. For starters, get an external frame, since they tend to be less expensive. There are many good backpacking books that discuss pack size and construction. Read one of these for more information and opinions. In general a pack of 3000 cu in works for an overnight or weekend trip, 4500 cu in is big enough for a weeklong hike. Pick a size so that the loaded pack that is no more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of your body weight. Remember, he who has the biggest pack carries the most stuff.

Duffel or Sports Bag. For campouts where we park the cars near the campsite, and do not leave the site (e.g., the Hither Hills or white water rafting trips), packing your gear in a duffel bag saves a lot of space when loading a vehicle. A partially full backpack takes as much room as a full one. So for this sort of campout, where the number of vehicles is limited, it is helpful if backpacks are not used.

Daypack. A daypack is used for campouts where we set up a base camp and take day hikes and return. The daypack will hold water, snacks or lunch and a first aid kit. The backpacks that are used for school supplies will work nicely for this purpose.

Tools. A pocketknife or a multi-tool, such as a Leatherman, is a necessary item. Pocketknives are lighter than multi-tools. A compass should always be carried, just in case. A flashlight with extra batteries and bulb is essential on any campout. Pick a good quality, lightweight flashlight, preferably one that uses 2-AA batteries or smaller.

Electronics. Radios, walkmans, cell phones, pagers, web phones, MP3 players, and the like have no place on a camp out. We backpack and camp to get away from this sort of stuff. Take it for the trip to the camp area, and then leave it in the car.



Other Stuff. Many enjoy having a camp chair to sit on around the campfire. Since these can be quite heavy, they are not suitable for backpacking. However, there are several styles of camp chairs that can double as a sleeping pad and weigh only a pound or so. These sit on the ground, versus those with metal legs. Get the metal leg chairs (less than \$15) for campouts where we park near the sites, and the lighter ones for backpacking. You will need to have straps to attach gear to the pack. Get an extra pair of straps for those times that the buckle breaks, or you have to strap additional troop gear onto the pack.

Before each campout, always go over the equipment list that is provided. This list is based on years of camping experience. Finally, the adult leaders and experienced Scouts are always happy to discuss gear and techniques with you and your son.