



Ultralight Backpacking Guide

Preparing for a backpacking trip can be fairly difficult. Because you are going to be “roughing it,” knowing what to expect and what to pack can be a little more difficult than packing for a regular trip. Before you just start throwing everything into your old school backpack and hoping you are going to be okay, you might want to consider doing some research. For those looking for a slightly more adventurous time, you may want to think about planning an ultralight backpacking trip, which will allow you to carry less and really challenge yourself with what you actually need to survive.

The biggest draw of any type of backpacking experience is to determine what you can handle, to see as much as you possibly can, and to do it all for as little cost as possible. Backpacking has been a popular mode of travel for a long time, and as long as people are able to slip a pack onto their back, they will most likely continue to go backpacking. However, you should learn more about ultralight backpacking before you start making your plans because it could just be the perfect way for you to backpack.



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What is Ultralight Backpacking?

Have you already taken a backpacking trip and are looking for a way to challenge yourself more while you are backpacking? Maybe you are just now planning your first backpacking trip, but would not mind making it a little more challenging? Ultralight backpacking is just that: it is a way to challenge yourself and really see what you consider to be crucial. The goal of an ultralight backpacking trip is to carry as little as possible, which for most means significantly reducing the amount of gear you take. When you carry less gear, you allow yourself to be slightly more vulnerable to things like weather and how you are able to prepare your food. However, the challenges you will have to face and overcome could just make all the risks involved well worth it.

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Ultralight Backpacking Food

The type of food you take on a normal backpacking trip is different for every person. For example, those backpacking through Europe may not pack that much food because they will be traveling from city to city where food can be acquired at relatively low prices, if you know what to look for and where to look for it. For those that are taking more of a hiking backpack trip, you might want to consider taking food that you can easily prepare over a fire or a camping stove. However, when you decide to go ultralight backpacking, the type of food you can take with you changes drastically.

Most ultralight backpackers do not travel from city to city, but are out in nature on hiking trails, in forests, or maybe climbing mountains. The type of food you will need depends on the type of environment you will be backpacking through. You should not always rely on being able to cook your food because you may not be able to always make a fire. In these situations, it best to have foods like peanut butter, various nuts, dried or cured meats, and protein bars. You also want to make sure that you have plenty of water and consume enough water to stay hydrated. Becoming dehydrated can lead to serious injuries and accidents.

Ultralight Backpacking Shelter

When it comes to choosing your shelter for an ultralight backpacking trip, there are several options. However, you will want to avoid a traditional double-walled tent. These types of tents have two layers of fabric, poles, stakes, and often a second piece of fabric to keep the bottom of the tent protected. The weight from all of these separate parts can really start to add up, which means that you will need a bigger back and will be just backpacking and not ultralight backpacking.

Many ultralight backpackers choose to use a tarp and bivouac sack or shelter to stay warm and dry while they are ultralight backpacking. A bivouac, or bivy, sack acts as a slip for your sleeping bag and provides an extra layer of warmth and keeps the rain off. The bivy shelter is a compromise between a tent and a bivy sack, which means that it is still relatively small and lightweight but provides you with more room. The bivy sacks and shelters not only cut down on your overall weight but also take up considerably less room in your pack than a traditional tent. Other methods of shelter include: tarps, hammocks, poncho-tarps, and the use of a bivy sack by itself.



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Ultralight Backpacking Gear List

As important as gear is to a regular backpacker, the gear an ultralight backpacker chooses and uses is even more crucial to the success of the trip. Because you ultimately have less gear with you, the gear you do carry needs to be the best and most functional gear possible. From your actual backpack all the way down to the light you choose to carry, there are great alternatives to traditional backpacking gear that provides you with the tools you need at a significantly reduced weight. Here are some of the pieces of gear you should consider.



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Matches: This one might be pretty obvious for any hiker, camper, or backpacker. But, for an ultralight backpacker, a fire will not only be a source of heat, but also a necessity for preparing certain foods. However, using a fire to cook food means that you will have to carry cooking utensils and some type of eating ware with you, which adds to the weight of your pack. Many ultralight backpackers, instead, choose to simply eat meals that do not require cooking.

Shoes: You will most likely be tempted to wear heavy duty hiking boots because you never really know what type of terrain you are going to come across. However, you can actually opt for a lighter trail running or regular running shoe, which will provide support, be lighter to carry, and will be more comfortable in the long run. You can also swap out those heavy wool socks for lighter nylon socks that still provide your feet with warmth.

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FIRST AID

First Aid Kit: While you should not necessarily compromise the type of first aid supplies you take with you, there are certainly lighter weight options that can choose from. In fact, some outdoor stores have first aid kits that are specifically designed with the ultralight backpacker in mind.

Pocket Knife: While many may choose to carry a larger and heavier multi-tool knife, ultralight backpackers opt for a much smaller pocketknife. Typically speaking, the knife is about an ounce in size and is considered to be a mini pocketknife.

Plastic Bottles: Most backpackers carry heavy and large reusable water bottles. While these types of bottles are great for the environment, they can really contribute a lot of weight in the long run. Because you are going to want to carry a lot of water, you should consider using used soft drink bottles to carry your water in because the plastic used for those types of bottles is significantly lighter than heavier-duty plastic water bottles.

Ultralight Backpacking Pack

Since you have already reduced one of the biggest weights of a backpacker by choosing a simpler shelter system, you can afford to get a pack that is lighter. Some ultralight packs either have incredibly light frames or no frames at all. In many cases, these packs have a weight limit of only 25 pounds. Part of the point of ultralight backpacking is to get back to the simplicity of it all, and these packs are often extremely rustic, which allows to fulfill your goals. Just make sure you check the weight limits of your pack and do not over fill it.

Ultralight backpacking can be extremely fun and extremely challenging. Keep in mind as you prepare for your trip that some things are just necessary to survive. If you are going to be gone for multiple days, then you will want to make sure you have a sufficient tent alternative, something to sleep in, and the most appropriate gear. In your attempt to make your pack lighter, you need to consider what is absolutely necessary for your survival. Be sure you are packing enough food. Choose the right kind of food that will provide you with energy, protein, and an appropriate amount of fat. You also need to make sure that you have planned out your water situation, which means you should have water when you leave, know where you can get water during your trip, and a way to treat that water once you have it. Once you have everything you need for your ultralight backpacking trip, it is time to pack it all up and enjoy your trip!