

Tips from the Old Scout

Tip # 5: Sleeping Bags

Tips from the Old Scout is a series of informational articles that will appear on the Troop 201 website each month. They are intended to be an information source for both parents and scouts on a variety of important topics relating to camping, backpacking and hiking.

The subject is sleeping bags. There are many styles, weights and materials to choose from. A rectangular bag has an open top, and is usually roomier, but will allow more heat to escape in cold weather. A “mummy” style bag is form fitting and closes around the head, and will be generally warmer.

Be sure to select a sleeping bag that is intended for backpacking/tent camping. The old scout has seen some younger scouts struggle through a cold night with a sleeping bag that was intended for a basement sleep-over, not the great outdoors!

Sleeping bags are now sold with a temperature rating – choose one with a rating of 15-20 degrees for the backpacking and camping we do in Troop 201. And remember that different people sleep “hot” or “cold”, so make sure you choose a bag that’s warm enough *for you*. As an option, you can purchase a “bag liner” to insert inside your sleeping bag – manufacturers claim you can get as much as an extra 10 degrees of warmth by using a bag liner. Another option is to wear additional *clean* clothing inside the bag to gain added warmth.

Important tip: Always change into clean sleeping clothes, including underwear and socks, before getting into the sleeping bag. Perspiration will make the cloths you wear all day damp, and this will cause you to be cold during the night unless you change into fresh, dry clothes. “Fluffing” the sleeping bag before getting into it will also make sure the insulation has expanded.

For backpacking, select a sleeping bag that weighs no more than 3 ½ pounds. Purchase a waterproof stuff sack, or wrap the sleeping bag in a plastic garbage bag if securing it on the outside of your backpack while hiking. Many sleeping bags now come with compression stuff sacks that allow you to make the bag very small for backpacking.

Down sleeping bags are insulated with goose down and feathers. They are light in weight, and warm, but require more care. They *cannot get wet* – because they will lose all their insulating ability and take a long time to dry out. Down sleeping bags are not recommended for scouts.

Modern synthetic insulation comes in many varieties. These sleeping bags are generally easier to care for than down bags, and will retain some of their thermal properties when wet. For this reason, sleeping bags with synthetic insulation are recommended for all scouts.

It's important to try out a sleeping bag to make sure it's a comfortable fit before purchasing it. Most of the outdoor stores (for example: Campmor, REI, Eastern Mountain Sports, Dicks) will have sample sleeping bags for you to try in the store.

Important tip: Make sure the bag zipper operates easily and does not catch on the fabric.

You will also need a **sleeping pad** under your sleeping bag – this provides a bit of comfort and important insulation from the cold ground. There are many styles including inflatable air pads, so called “self-inflating” pads that have foam cores, and a variety of folding or rolled foam pads. These come in full size, or torso only (you are expected to use your extra clothes from your backpack, or the backpack itself, to place under your legs). Again, try out the pad in the store to find one that's comfortable for you.

Bonus tip: Bring an old pillow case along with you on the backpacking trip. Fold and place your clothes inside the pillow-case to use as a pillow when backpacking.

Extra Bonus tip: Consider purchasing mosquito netting for summer camp. Tents at summer camp are not screened: mosquito netting fits over the cots as added insect protection, should you sleep with the bag open, or sleep on top of the bag.

Remember:

- Choose a sleeping bag and sleeping pad that's comfortable for you
- Be sure to thoroughly clean and dry your sleeping bag before storing
- Hang your sleeping bag while in storage, or pack it loosely in a large fabric bag or large cotton pillow case
- *Do not store a sleeping bag stuffed or rolled tightly in a compression sack!*