

How To Guide: Pitch the Perfect Tent

A beginner's guide to getting it right and ensuring a safe and secure pitch

Pitching a new tent is a daunting task and can take the inexperienced camper hours to get right – just what you need after work in the dark on a windy Friday night! The following guide is designed to give advice on pitching for the first time but please remember that the only thing that makes pitching tents quicker and easier is practice and experience

Your tent should come with instructions – check these before you head off camping as without them you may be stuck. Check for these inside the tent bag (sometimes even stitched into the bag) or in any outer plastic sleeve. If you still cannot find them, most newer tents now have instruction guides available online, and sometimes videos too - YouTube can be an invaluable tool for folding down a tricky pop-up tent!

Before pitching your new tent please read and re-read all instructions and follow them carefully to avoid accidents, breakages or simply having to start over

TEST PITCHING

Practice pitching your tent before your first camping holiday to familiarize yourself with your new tent – if possible in your garden to check that all necessary components have been included by the manufacturer. You may find that bigger tents need one or more people to help you pitch as modern tents can be very large and cumbersome

PITCHING

Good quality tents that are properly maintained and pitched should withstand most normal weather conditions, but remember that they are folding, lightweight structures and that storm damage and general misuse is NOT covered by the manufacturer's guarantee. You should always be prepared to strike your tent in the event of sudden severe weather, and having good insurance cover for your expensive tent is highly recommended

The step by step guide below will explain how to correctly pitch a tent:

1. Select an area on the camp site which is as flat as possible. Avoid marshy, low-lying ground which could flood under conditions of heavy rain. Clear the site of sticks, stones or sharp objects which could pierce the groundsheet and damage the tent
2. Try not to pitch your tent under any trees - besides dripping long after it has stopped raining, some trees may drop sticky sap onto your tent. This will not only make the tent dirty and difficult to clean, but it could also affect the waterproofing of the tent and damage the fabric. Bird droppings are also not very pleasant and pitching under a perfect pigeon perch should be avoided for obvious reasons
3. Pitch the tent a minimum of 6 meters from the adjacent tents and awnings. If a neighbouring tent blows down in the middle of the night, this will help avoid it crashing into your tent. Try to make good use of safe natural windbreaks such as hedges, and where possible face the tent door away from the prevailing wind. This will help shield your tent from any excessive winds that could build up over the course of the day or night
4. Lay out your tent, poles and pegs so that they are in view and easily accessible (A footprint groundsheet or sheet of strong polythene beneath your tent is advisable as it will give extra protection and help keep the tent groundsheet clean. This is especially important if your new tent has a sewn in groundsheet (SIG), as they are difficult to replace or repair – many have an optional footprint groundsheet available to purchase which is ideal)
5. Follow the tent instructions in order to correctly pitch your tent. Always ensure your tent is pitched with all the zips closed, this will ensure the tent stays the correct shape once it has been erected. Cross over the pegs situated at the base of the zips, this will relieve any stress on the zips of the tent
6. Ensure the groundsheet is securely fastened to the ground with appropriate pegs; any loose material can cause children or adults to trip over the sagging material. Drive tent pegs into the ground at an angle to the direction of pull to get the best grip in the ground. Ensure to peg in line of the seams of the tent
7. Camping World recommends that all pegging points and guy lines are securely fastened down at all times with pegs appropriate for the ground you are camping on - this will help prevent damage of the tent or fibreglass poles from sudden gusts of wind. Rubber guy loops should be stretched sufficiently to apply tension to the fabric of the tent without over stretching
8. Ensure the tent is well ventilated by opening all air vents. This will reduce condensation build up overnight

TOP TIPS:

DO NOT FORCE: Treat all zips carefully, and try not to tread on your tent (especially if wearing boots or heels) and keep zips clean, especially in sandy or muddy conditions as this will allow them to run smoothly and prevent snagging

DO NOT DRAG: Ensure your tent is always carried safely. Dragging your tent across the ground (especially over gravel) will tear holes in the bag and flysheet

DO NOT COOK IN A TENT: keep all sources of fire or heat away from tent materials. Remember that heat rises

Whilst occupying a tent keep the tent exits clear at all times in case of fire. Fires may not be caused by you but can be very dangerous in a camping environment. Never allow children to play around cooking, heating or lighting equipment

Always carry a tent repair kit as well as spare tent poles so that you can repair your tent if necessary

CONDENSATION

Condensation often occurs in synthetic and even in cotton tents. Do not confuse this with leakage. Good ventilation will help reduce the condensation. The moisture from the air, cooking, and even your breath can under certain conditions form beads or drops of water when it comes into contact with cold surfaces. Always ensure all items are not in contact with the sides of the tent and nothing causes the inner tents or materials to touch the inner of the flysheet as the condensation will then be drawn into the tent

STORING YOUR TENT

It is ok to take the tent home wet, but before packing it away for more than a day the TENT MUST BE COMPLETELY DRY. Mildew sets in very quickly and is impossible to completely repair

A footprint groundsheet of your tent will help prevent the bottom of your tent getting wet and make it easier to pack away after camping

Tent fabrics will be affected by exposure to ultraviolet light and acid rain - the colour will change and the fabric will become weaker. If you're planning to keep your tent pitched for long periods, then seek a site which is as shaded as possible and check on the tent regularly. Pitch rotation may help longevity

CLEANING YOUR TENT

Tents are best cleaned using warm water and a detergent free soap. Detergents can strip the waterproofing of your tent. DO NOT SCRUB. Rinse well and dry thoroughly and re-proof with a waterproofing spray as necessary

PACKING DOWN

Strike your tent in the reverse order of the pitching instructions. In the case of pop up tents the first few attempts at folding down may be frustrating; this is normal and you will soon get the hang of it

Please make sure you extinguish any fires and clear any rubbish from your campsite. Dispose of toilet chemicals only in designated places. Leave the area as you would hope to find it when you return for your next camping trip



Pictured: Outwell Bear Lake 6 Tunnel Tent 2011