

Troop 405

New Camper's Information & Tips

Getting started in camping can be somewhat intimidating for those who have not done it, or not done it recently. There is lots of equipment on the market and there are plenty of opinions as to what is and isn't necessary. This guide can be used as a starting point for new scouts and their parents as to what to buy, and just as importantly, what not to buy when you are just starting out.

Personal Gear vs. Troop/Patrol Gear – Troop 405 provides common equipment for each patrol on every campout in a patrol box. This includes: cooking gear (dutch oven, pots, pans, knives, utensils for cooking), stoves, lantern, propane, dining fly, paper towels, aluminum foil, two wash basins, dish towels, dish soap, sponge. Scouts are not expected to pack this gear with their own equipment and there's no need to buy any of it up front. Scouts are generally expected to provide their own tents, although they are encouraged to share a tent with another scout.

Backpacks – Not necessary on most trips, unless we are doing backpack camping. Many of Troop 405's camping are car camping, meaning that we park close to where we are camping. A duffel bag with handles is more than adequate for car camping. Notable exceptions to car camping trips are backpacking trips, Camporee, and Camp Wolfboro where all first year scouts will go on a 5 mile overnight backpack trek. The Troop has some backpacks that are stored in the Troop shed. And these are available on a first come first served basis. Most of these backpacks are sized for younger boys. Another option is to rent a backpack at REI in the Willows Shopping Center.

Sleeping Bags – They come in all shapes sizes and price ranges. For general use, a bag with synthetic fill (such as "Hollofil") that is rated at 20 degrees should be ok. Down filled sleeping bags are lighter and, therefore, generally preferable for backpacking (but down is more expensive, and is worthless if it is wet).

Sleeping Pads – Keep in mind that you need to insulate yourself from the ground – a pad serves that purpose, as well as keeping you comfortable. There are two basic types of pads – foam pads, that are lightweight and inexpensive but don't give much comfort. Or the self inflating (such as Thermarest) which are heavier and much more expensive but in my opinion are much more comfortable. (But comfort however is very subjective).

Pillow – Pillows are a matter of personal preference – There are inflatable pillows, backpacking pillows, or other small pillows. Many find that a rolled up jacket or sweatshirt work just fine.

Things to Wear – What to wear is a function of the weather – how hot, how cold, and how wet. But keep a few things in mind:

Rain gear – It will rain so be prepared. A good quality poncho is probably the best all-around rain gear. I don't recommend buying a plastic rain suit, they don't breathe and are miserable to wear, although you will stay dry from the rain but you will get wet from your own perspiration. There are a number of high quality rain suits that do breathe (made out of fabrics such as gore-tex). These are great but are very expensive and most boys will outgrow them before they have gotten their parents money worth out of them. As an emergency bring along an extra large, extra long, extra strong garbage bag, that can be used as a make shift poncho.

Clothing – The key to comfortable camping is staying warm and dry. Cotton clothing is not the way to make that happen. Cotton (such as blue jeans, or thermal underwear) gets wet and stays wet, and when it's wet the wearer gets cold and stays cold. Cotton T-Shirts are OK for camping when it is warm and dry, but be prepared for other weather. Synthetics or silk will wick moisture away from the body whether it comes from sweat or rain, and helps maintain a comfortable comfort level. For cooler weather, layering is the key . . . layers of clothing that can be put on or taken off as needed.

Footwear – Keeping your feet dry and comfortable are absolute musts when camping, it is always a good idea to bring extra socks and an extra pair of shoes. Try to use hiking socks (not cotton) that wick moisture away from the feet. Hiking boots are best for camping especially if they are waterproof, or have been sprayed with a waterproofing material, make sure they fit well (when wearing thick hiking socks) and are broken in before going on a long hike.

Toiletries - Keep it simple. All the average Scout needs for a weekend campout are a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, and a small towel. You can pack more but the chances of it getting used are slim. You can purchase camping towels which are lightweight, hold lots of moisture, and dry quickly – these are nice, but certainly not a necessity.

Cooking Gear – As stated above the troop will provide the cooking gear. The Scout will need his own eating gear “mess kit”, consisting of a bowl, plate, something to drink out of, and utensils.

Other Gear:

Pocket Knife – very handy, but no need to buy a Swiss Army Knife with 30 different gadgets, a knife with 1 or 2 blades is really all the new Scout needs. Brightly colored is better. They routinely get dropped and a camouflage design on a knife will do just what it is designed to do – remain camouflaged. The knife blade can be no more that 3 1/2 inches, and it must fold (no sheath knives). A locking blade knife is a safer knife, Scouts are not allowed to use there knife until they have earned there Totem' Chip. (This is normally taught on the first campout).

Compass – Go for the basic model, about \$10 should buy a quality basic compass.

Sunglasses – If you get them, make sure they have UV protection – cheap sunglasses without UV protection are worse than no sunglasses at all.

Emergency whistle – nice to have if there’s any chance of wandering away from the group – nothing fancy.

Rope – A small amount of nylon cord comes in handy for repairs, clotheslines, tent guys, etc. 50 feet should suffice.

Flashlight – small, inexpensive, and brightly colored – and always bring extra batteries. Don’t buy ultra small penlights – they don’t last that long. Don’t buy huge flashlights that take 8 D-cells, there to big and heavy; I have found that the 2 or 4 “AA” cell flashlights work just fine. Recently many of the flashlights are using LED lights, which generally don’t burn out. Also the head lamps are useful but not necessary.

First Aid Kit – The troop brings a large first aid kit on all campouts. Scouts should still bring a personal first aid kit with band aids, disinfectant, and moleskin (for preventing blisters) should be all that a Scout needs.

Water Bottle – Any will do as long as it is big enough. 2 quarts is the suggested amount that everyone should take on a hike over 5 miles. If you want to buy one, buy a wide mouth water bottle (such as Nalgene). They’re easier to clean, easier to fill, and easier for adding ice to. You can also clip it to a backpack or belt loop with a carabiner.

Hopefully this will give you a start on what the Scout needs. As a Scout becomes more adept at camping, he’ll have a better sense for what he needs. I will close with three comments:

- 1) For things that a Scout will not outgrow and is not likely to readily lose (such as a tent or sleeping bag), it generally pays to go with higher quality the first time.
- 2) Ask family and friends to loan some gear, unless you know that your son will definitely stick with Scouts. Birthday’s and Christmas are a great time to help increase the Scouts gear supply.
- 3) Put your Scouts name on all personal gear with a permanent marker. Despite our best efforts things do get mixed up and this helps to sort things out.