Survival Kits 101

Each of us has different skills and different needs. Someone who rides a mountain bike will want to carry less than someone who is preparing a survival kit to be stored in the trunk of a car or in the house. There is only one rule: do not put anything into your kit that you do not know how to use. In the back pages you will find recommendations for survival kits from FEMA and the Red Cross. These are good starting places, but you should personalize your kit to meet your needs, the needs of your family and friends.

This list includes a few of my personal preferences. I have been willing to trust my life to these pieces of gear, but this does not mean that YOU should trust your life to these things without independent testing BY YOU. No kit will substitute for training and experience. Take a first aid course, re-train and upgrade your skills whenever possible. You never know when someone might need your help. The life you save might even be your own.

1) Water – this ranks among the highest physical needs for human beings. If the climate itself does not pose a threat, than water is often THE most important need. Most of us can survive for several weeks without food. A general rule, humans need one gallon of water per person per day. We can survive on much less, but with a gallon per day we can live comfortably.

   a. Mini – a plastic bag (or two) and some water purification tablets or drops. Common brand names include Potable Aqua, Katadyn MicroPur, and Aquamira. (Personal favorite – Aquamira Water Treatment Drops)
   b. Moderate – a water container and a handheld water filtration system. Common brand names include: MSR, Katadyn, Sawyer. (Personal favorite – Katadyn Pocket Water Microfilter)
   c. Heavy or Household – a water tank and a water filtration system designed for a “basecamp.” (Personal favorite – I have no opinion; I do not own one.)

2) Shelter – if it is extremely cold, extremely hot, or very wet, shelter will be a need.

   a. Mini – a sheet of plastic and parachute cord. Common alternatives include the classic silver emergency blanket, a “space” blanket, a large rain poncho, a Sportsman’s blanket, a tube tent, and a plastic tarp. (Personal favorite – a Sportsman’s blanket. These are typically silver on one side and are colored on the other, some models have a hood and hand pockets to facilitate using them as a poncho.)
   b. Moderate – a nylon tarp, a bivy sack or lightweight tent designed for camping. (Personal Favorite – Black Diamond Betamid Light tent. It weighs about a pound and a half and is designed to be supported by trekking poles.)
   c. Heavy or Household – in a temperate environment a tarp will often provide sufficient shelter, particularly if it is combined with insect netting, but in winter or in rough weather a four season tent is well worth the extra weight.
3) Fire – this is less about cooking than it is about staying warm in cold conditions by being able to heat water. Be very careful to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning – do not use camp stoves in enclosed spaces. Sitting several people under a sheet of plastic, tucking in the edges and holding a plumber’s candle can keep a group warm through a very cold night.

   a. Mini – some fire starter that you actually know how to use. Disposable lighters are among the most common components in a modern emergency kit. Candles are good; plumbers candles are very popular. A flint and steel can be long term life savers if you know how to use them. See the appendix on fire starters. (Personal favorite – I often carry a flint and steel in my briefcase.)
   b. Moderate – a backpacking stove. There are many choices in this category, but the type of fuel you will want to use is a basic consideration. The minimalist versions use fuel pellets. Some stoves take fuel canisters. Some operate on white gas. Some can operate on everything from kerosene to gasoline. (Personal favorite – for fuel tablets Esbit makes several good stoves, also I like the stove stands for US military canteen cups; for gas canister stoves I like the Optimus Crux Lite with Terra Nova Cookset or the MSR Pocket Rocket; if liquid fuel is the better option: I like the MSR XKG EX Extreme Condition Stove.)
   c. Heavy of Household – multi burner propane stove or gas grill. ONLY use this outside!

4) Signaling – many survival kits include items like signal mirrors, rescue whistles, compasses, light sticks, and flashlights. The classic silver “survival blanket” is highly visible. Rescue mirrors are good … again … if you know how to use them, a CD or DVD can be substituted in a pinch. Some kits include smoke bombs and signal flairs. Loud whistles are good. Air horns work well, but it is wise to acquire the kind that can be recharged with a hand pump. Flashlights come in many varieties, lean toward a waterproof version. (Personal Favorite – for way finding and mirror signaling a Silva or a Brunton compass with a sighting mirror, for sound a regular metal whistle, for light a Petzel Zipka Headlamp.)

5) First Aid Kit – do not forget to include personal medications, prescriptions for medications and for eyeglasses. This is a good place to store copies of personal identification and other important documents.

   b. Basic – sterile gauze, athletic tape, scissors, an elastic or “Ace” bandage.
   c. Moderate – Trauma shears, tweezers, safety pins, thermometer, rescue mask, “2nd Skin” dressings, antibiotic ointment, knuckle and fingertip fabric bandages, 3x4 non-stick gauze pads, “Coban” wrap, 1-inch cloth tape, wire or “SAM” splint, nitrile gloves, 12cc irrigation syringe, povidone-iodine solution, antiseptic
towelettes, sterile scrub brush, wound closure strips, tincture of benzoin swabs, Moleskin dressings, 1x3 fabric bandages, 4x4 sterile gauze pads, 3-inch conforming roll gauze, transparent film dressing, 4-6 inch elastic or “Ace” wrap, triangular bandages.  
(The “moderate” list is adopted from the Wilderness Medical Institute of the National Outdoor Leadership School.)

d. Heavy – to the “moderate list” add things that your level of skill allows you to use and add things that you would normally use at home.

6) Personal protection – dust mask or respirator, gloves work and nitrile.

7) Hygiene and Waste Disposal – trash compactor bags, small shovel or folding trowel, Kleenex pocket packs. Toiletries: toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, comb, washcloth, wet wipes.

8) Food

9) Radio and Communications

10) Knives and Multi-tools

Other Items to Consider:

- Clothing – there is no such thing as bad weather … only inappropriate clothing
- Sleeping Bag
- Parachute Cord or Rope
- Duct Tape
- Can Opener
- Basic Hand Tools
- Folding Saw
- Note Pad and Pencil
- Playing Cards
- Sewing Kit
- Power Source (Batteries, Solar Roll or Solar Panels, Small Gasoline Generator)
- Disinfectant
- Books, books and more books.

Fire Starters:  (http://www.lovetheoutdoors.com/camping/tips/firestarters.htm)

- Take 100% cotton balls and thoroughly rub Vaseline into them. Keep in a Ziploc bag.
- Use lint from your dryer as a fire starter.
- Bundle about 10-12 Diamond brand “strike-anywhere” wooden kitchen matches together with waxed dental floss. The heads of the matches should all be pointing in the same direction. Generously soak the bundle of matches (except heads) in melted paraffin wax.
to waterproof and to provide a long burn time. Dip heads lightly only to waterproof them. Simply strike on flat rock to ignite.

- Cut a cotton cord into 1” lengths and soak in melted wax. Let dry and store in empty film container or Ziploc bag.
- Cut waxed milk cartons into strips to be used as kindling for your campfire.
- Stuff paper towel or toilet paper rolls with paper.
- Waterproof your matches by dipping them in wax or coating them with clear nail polish
- Keep a plastic “twister” type of pencil sharpener handy. It’s great for shaving kindling (especially if wood is damp)
- Use wooden ice cream/popsicle sticks. Keep them in a watertight container.
- Take an empty toilet paper roll and tie some tissue paper onto one end with some twine. Fill roll with sawdust, cotton balls, etc. Tie the other end as you did the first one, but leave some string hanging out. Put candle wax on the string.
- Use old tuna or cat food cans. Wash & dry. Cut long pieces of cardboard about 1 1/2 inches wide. Roll these into tight spirals. Pour empty cans about half full of wax. Insert cardboard spirals and let the wax set.
- 9-volt battery and steel wool
- In a pinch nondairy creamer is usually rather ignitable.

**Red Cross List:**

- Water—one gallon per person, per day (3-day supply for evacuation, 2-week supply for home)
- Food—non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items (3-day supply for evacuation, 2-week supply for home)
- Flashlight
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible)
- Extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Medications (7-day supply) and medical items
- Multipurpose tool
- Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- Copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- Cell phone with chargers
- Family and emergency contact information
- Extra cash
- Emergency blanket
- Map(s) of the area

Suggested items to help meet additional needs are:

- Medical supplies (hearing aids with extra batteries, glasses, contact lenses, syringes, cane)
- Baby supplies (bottles, formula, baby food, diapers)
• Games and activities for children
• Pet supplies (collar, leash, ID, food, carrier, bowl)
• Two-way radios
• Extra set of car keys and house keys
• Manual can opener

Additional supplies to keep at home or in your kit based on the types of disasters common to our area:

• Whistle
• N95 or surgical masks
• Matches
• Rain gear
• Towels
• Work gloves
• Tools/supplies for securing your home
• Extra clothing, hat and sturdy shoes
• Plastic sheeting
• Duct tape
• Scissors
• Household liquid bleach
• Entertainment items
• Blankets or sleeping bags

**FEMA Survival Kit List:**

Recommended Supplies to Include in a Basic Kit:

• Water, one gallon of water per person per day, for drinking and sanitation
• Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
• Battery-powered radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert, and extra batteries for both
• Flashlight and extra batteries
• First Aid kit
• Whistle to signal for help
• Infant formula and diapers, if you have an infant
• Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
• Dust mask or cotton t-shirt, to help filter the air
• Plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
• Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
• Can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)

Clothing and Bedding:
If you live in a cold weather climate, you must think about warmth. It is possible that the power will be out and you will not have heat. Rethink your clothing and bedding supplies to account for growing children and other family changes. One complete change of warm clothing and shoes per person, including:

- A jacket or coat
- Long pants
- A long sleeve shirt
- Sturdy shoes
- A hat and gloves
- A sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person

Family Supply List (continued)

Below are some other items for your family to consider adding to its supply kit. Some of these items, especially those marked with a "can be dangerous, so please have an adult collect these supplies.

- Emergency reference materials such as a first aid book or a print out of the information on www.ready.gov
- Rain gear
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils
- Cash or traveler’s checks, change
- Paper towels
- Fire Extinguisher
- Tent
- Compass
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Signal flare
- Paper, pencil
- Personal hygiene items including feminine supplies
- Disinfectant
- Household chlorine bleach - You can use bleach as a disinfectant (diluted nine parts water to one part bleach), or in an emergency you can also use it to treat water. Use 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Medicine dropper
- Important Family Documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container