

CAMPING GEAR BASICS FOR NEW 11 YEAR OLD SCOUTS

(Southern climate)

Don't be intimidated. An 11 year old Boy Scout does not need a whole lot of camping gear. Here are my comments about the few things he does need. Download at kurtelieson.com

Don't be afraid to disagree. These comments are based on many years of experience, but there is room for reasonable minds to disagree.

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1. Sleeping Bag

Required, but the troop has a few that can be borrowed.

Sleeping bags come in two shapes: square footed and tapered mummy. Mummy bags are about ten degrees warmer (assuming all other factors are equal), but mummy bags are less comfortable because they restrict leg movement. For about \$30 you can get a reasonably durable square bag with cloth interior that is rated down to 30 degrees (or to 20 degrees when zipped into mummy shape). These bags are fine for car camping, but at 6 pounds they are heavy and bulky for lengthy high adventure-type backpacking.

When older and backpacking serious distances, a boy will prefer to have a bag for \$60 that is rated to the same temperature but weighs only 3 pounds and packs much smaller. Slumberjack, Kelty and others make reliable bags that fit this description.

For \$10 you can also get a fleece liner that will add a fabric interior to the sleeping bag and increase its temperature rating another 10 degrees. These roll up very small and weigh only 2 pounds, and during the summer months I just use the liner instead of a sleeping bag.

Remember that in summer it is no fun to sleep in a bag that has a nylon interior. You can get a bag with a fleece interior, buy a fleece liner to go inside, use a fleece liner instead of a bag, sew up a sheet as a liner, sleep on a cot, or do anything else that is not sleeping on sweaty nylon when the nightly low temperature may not even go below 80 degrees.

2. Sleeping Pad

Required only when cold, but always appreciated.

In cold weather, a foam pad will be the only insulation between you and the cold ground (since you will squash all your sleeping bag's insulating air pockets out from underneath you).

A pad will cost about \$10 and should be made of "closed cell foam." It does not have to be Coleman brand, but the foam should look similar to the Coleman pads at Wal-Mart. Even the thicker ones weigh only about a pound, but I prefer a thinner pad that rolls up to fit more easily on the bottom of my backpack along with my tent and sleeping bag.

It is possible to spend \$100 on a top quality sleeping pad. But as long as you need the advice on this page, you should not spend more than \$15.

3. Tent

Necessary, but the troop has plenty to borrow.

If you do get a tent, my suggestions are: (1) Get a dome tent; it does not have to be a circle, but fiberglass poles should support the tent vertically. (2) Go to Academy or maybe Wal-Mart and only spend about \$20-\$30 since young boys are likely to damage a tent before even a cheap one would wear out. (3) Lighter is better once a boy starts backpacking into camp, so do not get anything heavier than 6 lbs, which means nothing bigger than a 7'x7' square footprint that will sleep 3; I love the 6'x6' hexagonal footprint that will sleep 2. A 1-man tent should not weigh more than 4 pounds. (4) I prefer for the bottom to be made of thick tarp fabric rather than thin tent fabric, and ideally this would even extend up the sides for 6" to create a dry bowl inside the tent, but this is something you only find if you happen to get lucky.

4. Backpack

In our troop, not needed until a boy turns 12. Then required.

This is one of the pieces of gear a boy is really anxious to get. But I am happy to have the 11 year old new scouts just camp next to the car. Read my notes on [Backpack Basics](#) and [Fast Start Reflections](#) to understand my reasons for that policy.

Boys are permitted to bring backpacks if they want when camping next to the car, it just doesn't function any better than a large rubbermaid tub, soft gym bag, or even a plastic trash bag.

Before buying a backpack, be sure you read my comments about [Backpack Basics](#), especially shoulder straps. There is no reason a young boy needs to carry a backpack that weighs more than 4 pounds.

5. Canteen or Water Bottle

Required! I personally prefer the cheap quart-sized plastic canteens with green lids from Academy since they fit nicely in the top side pockets of my backpack and can go through the dishwasher. I can understand getting something a little fancier with a carrying strap. But even an old Gatorade bottle works. No less than a quart, and no need for more.

6. Eating Utensils

Required, but need not be fancy. All you need is a cup, a plate or bowl, a spoon, and maybe a knife and fork (please do not encourage using a pocketknife as a food utensil).

For the last 25 years I have rarely used more than the following:

- two 16 oz. Coughlan brand “sierra cups” (one for eating and one for drinking, with an insulated rim so I don't burn my lips if it is full of hot chocolate); some people use a large plastic cup and a frisbee
- a spoon made of lexan (durable plastic) and an old metal fork with the two middle tines filed out (for ease of cleaning); a heavy duty plastic spork would probably work as well.

The troop has large cook pots, fry pans and dutch ovens, and if the boys are cooking anything beyond boiled water, then they are probably cooking together in large quantities that a personal cook pot won't handle anyway.

The three-in-one camping silverware kits are fine, neither good nor bad, but do not expect to continue putting freshly cleaned silverware in that soon-to-be-filthy plastic sleeve.

I have a rule that every piece of cooking gear (and water bottle) that goes on a campout must go through the dishwasher, even if it did not get used.

7. Poncho

Required when weather.com says so. You can get this at Academy for \$1. The more you pay, the drier, heavier and hotter it is. This is a continuum with no single right answer. And the considerations are very different in July and January. Whatever you get, assume it will be used only once unless an adult takes good care of it afterward to avoid mildew.

8. Pocketknife

Completely optional. Boys always want to have a knife, but they will rarely need to use it. Pocketknives are generally permitted on outings, but I can't remember the last time a boy needed to have his own. There is a rule of thumb that says the quality goes down as the number of blades and gadgets goes up. The one I have used for the last 30 years has only one blade. There is no reason for it to weigh more than 6 ounces. Knives must fold closed; sheath knives and butterfly knives are never allowed.

9. Compass

Good to have but not required. Get one that has a clear plastic base at Wal-Mart for about \$4. I think a plastic base makes it easier to teach how to use the compass. The one I have personally used for the last 20 years is even smaller and less fancy than that. Avoid the black flip-top compasses; they are harder for the boys to figure out.

10. Flashlight

Okay but not required. The boys each like to have their own and you can get them as cheap as \$1. Yes, the \$1 version is a bit heavy, but first year scouts camp next to the car so weight is not an issue. Get him a smaller and more expensive model when he is a year older and hikes in to an overnight camp with some regularity (and has hopefully learned not to lose stuff quite so often).

Three More Comments

Scout T-shirt – Nice to have but not required. Why destroy a scout uniform shirt on a campout when you can instead destroy a T-shirt?

Moleskin and small folding Scissors – Good to have but not required. This is the first first-aid item that I encourage a boy to get for himself and bring on hikes.

Boots – Not required until probably age 14 when serious lengthy backpacking begins. I have had success with cheap boots, but not everyone agrees. I have also backpacked into camp overnight without problem on easy dirt paths in both tennis shoes and topsiders. Boots become a necessity when you do rugged hiking (with or without a backpack) where you are worried about either: (1) ankle support to avoid twisting your ankle on large rocks or eroded gulleys, or (2) you want a stiffer sole to absorb some of the impacts from rocks, etc.