

Tents and Shelters

Desert campers need open, airy shelters to protect them from the sun. Cool- and cold-weather campers need tight, strong tents able to withstand strong winds and hold heat inside. Fortunately, there are shelters available to accommodate any user, in a variety of price and quality ranges. All your tent does is keep you sheltered from rain, wind, sun and bugs—not too important!

Tarp. The simplest of all tents, a nylon tarp weighs just a few pounds and can be set up in dozens of ways. It can be used as a sun shade, as your primary shelter, or as a dining fly protecting your cooking area from the elements. A tarp has no floor, which can pose problems in soggy areas, nor does it have mosquito netting.

A-frame tent. Like a pup tent, only made of stronger, modern materials. The A-frame is roomy and usually has a waterproof floor and mosquito netting. Breathable fabric allows moisture to escape from inside, while a rain fly protects the inside from exterior moisture. A-frame tents have lots of headroom, but this tent does not do well in heavy winds or snow.

Dome. The most common tent. Contemporary designs and fabric have made possible a variety of dome-shaped tents. Their configurations help them stand up in the wind and rain. Dome tents offer lots of useable floor space and headroom. They are usually freestanding, so they can easily be moved before taking down. Freestanding tents are convenient to set up, but still need to be staked down so they don't become free-flying in unexpected winds. Be sure to use the fly to prevent moisture from rain or dew from reaching your gear inside.

Care and Upkeep

Practice setting up and taking down your tent in your living room or backyard, before you have to do it in the rain or by flashlight. Read the instructions! Seal the seams on your new tent right after you get it. Pitch it tautly, then go over fly and floor seams with waterproof seam sealer.

Air your tent out after you get back from a campout. Brush out any dirt or pine needles that have collected. After airing, store it loosely in a cool, dry place. Opening zippers completely before going through doors will prevent damage.