

Packing a backpack

Learn how to correctly load your pack for your next hike

While many backpackers just throw their gear into their packs with no organization the day before their trip, there is a method in packing it properly to improve their overall backpacking experience.

Learning to organize your gear properly before loading your backpack will eliminate forgotten items and help you remove unnecessary luxuries. In addition, efficiently packing your backpack will give you more comfort, convenience and stability.



Backpack capacity

Before loading the pack with your backpacking gear, be sure that you have the proper pack size to fit the gear you plan to bring. In short, you want to find the line between eliminated unnecessary weight and certain luxuries for comfort.

Upgrading to new and lighter equipment will help keep weight and pack size down. Also, keep in mind that shorter trips will require you to pack less gear while more gear, such as clothes and food, are needed for longer trips. For more detailed information on choosing a backpacking backpack and finding the right pack size for you, see the table below.

Trip Duration	Season	Pack Capacity (liters)
5 nights or more	Summer	65-80
	Spring/Fall	80-90
	Winter	80-90
3-5 nights	Summer	50-65
	Spring/Fall	65-80
	Winter	80-90
1-2 nights	Summer	40-50
	Spring/Fall	50-55
	Winter	65-80
Day hikes	Summer	25-35
	Spring/Fall	35-40
	Winter	40-55

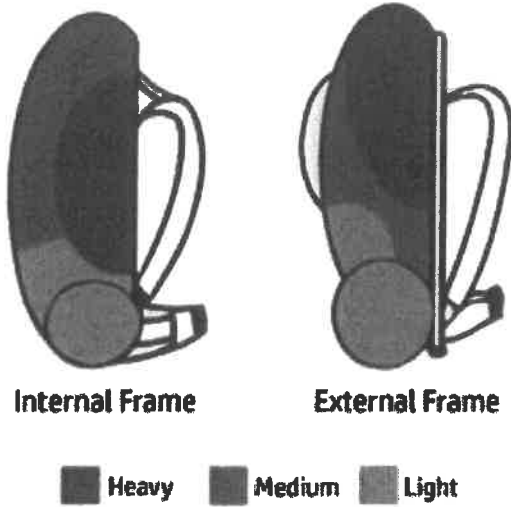
Backpack weight distribution

By distributing weight in a specific manner, you can achieve better comfort, convenience and stability. Instead of simply stuffing your backpacking gear inside your bag, follow these guidelines.

Internal backpacks have recently become the standard backpacking frame type. While trail hiking with an internal-frame pack, items with the most weight should be centered high between the shoulder blades and close to your back. By doing this, the weight is placed on the hips which should hold most of our backpacking pack's weight. When off the trail, items should be placed a bit lower on the back, lowering your center of gravity and stabilizing you better on rough terrain.

External backpacks are still used, although less common than internal frames. They are recommended for trail hiking only. The heaviest items should be packed on top and closest to the back to center the pack's weight over the hips and help you stay in a more upright stance.

Backpack Weight Distribution



Be careful not to overload your pack or body. A loaded backpack shouldn't exceed 25% - 30% of your body weight. Although this is a general guideline, beginner backpackers and less-fit persons should start with less weight. Some experienced backpackers may be able to carry more weight.



Backpack organization

In order to pack your backpack correctly, you may want to lay out all of your backpacking equipment to get it organized. This is a great way to make sure you have all your gear. Another good idea is to cluster similar small items, such as eating utensils and pots, together in zip lock or stuff bags. You may want to go even further and color-code them as well. It is also a good idea to store food and liquid fuel in bags to prevent spills.

When packing your backpack, be sure to fill in all empty space with small or compressible items. For example, you can stuff a shirt inside a pot, put a roll of duct tape around your hiking poles, or remove your sleeping bag from its sack and stuff it around other gear. If you are using a bear canister, as more and more national parks and wilderness areas are requiring, be sure to fill it completely full with food and other scented items (be sure to pack this closest to your back).

Certain items like a GPS, insect repellent, snack food, rainwear, or a headlamp may need to be accessed at any time. Because of this, these essential things should be stored inside a front pocket, top lid, or in the top of the main compartment so they can be found with minimum searching.

After your bag is loaded and packed, tighten all compression straps to limit load-shifting while hiking.

Which backpack size is needed for a four-night stay in October?

- 50-55 liters
- 65-80 liters
- 80-90 liters

Below are three backpacks.



Gregory Wander
Capacity: 60 liters
internal frame

High Sierra Explorer
Capacity: 50 liters
internal frame

Kelty Yukon
Capacity: 48 liters
external frame

Which is the most suitable pack for a one-day off-trail hiking trip in January?

- Gregory Wander
- High Sierra Explorer
- Kelty Yukon

A customer tells you he is backpacking for the first time.

How much weight should he carry?

- less than 25% of his body weight
- between 25% and 30% of his body weight
- more than 30% of his body weight

Are the following reasons for using bags in a backpack mentioned in the text?

Click 'Yes' or 'No'.

	Yes	No
It is possible to keep small things of the same type together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will stop animals from getting to the food.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will stop food or drink dirtying the rest of the gear.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>