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Bug out Bag guide

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1. Why do you need a bug out bag?

If you are forced to leave your home quickly, having the right items available ready to go is critical for survival. Even more important, you need to have these supplies ready to leave on a moment's notice without having to run around your house to try and find everything. How many times have you gone on vacation and forgot something? Now imagine an urgent "situation" out of your control occurs requiring you and your family to leave your house within minutes. Having forgotten something won't just be a matter of inconvenience, it could cost your life if you are forced to survive in a harsh environment. Think that could never happen? Remember Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath in New Orleans? While "bugging out" is probably the last thing I want to do in an emergency situation (my preference is to definitely "bug-in"), I may not have a choice in the matter. This is why the concept of the bug out bag (aka B.O.B.) has become so popular in the prepper community.

Writing a document about the "perfect" B.O.B. is all but nearly impossible. Each region has different challenges for survival and different individuals have unique physical abilities and limitations. A person living a desert area has different considerations than a person living around large amounts of water. Someone with a small frame may not be able to carry the same load as someone that is in great physical shape (side note: it's amazing to see what someone faced with great obstacles in the face of survival can overcome). But despite the differences, there's a common thread for what you should include in your bag. The goal is to pack whatever gear you think will be necessary for your environment and situation to survive for 72 hours that you can carry on your person.

2. What are the most important elements to have in your B.O.B.?

Let's start with the basics of what every B.O.B. should contain. For that, I'll use Dave Canterbury's 10 C's of survival as they serve as a great primer to start building your B.O.B.

Top 10 tools your B.O.B. should contain:

1. **Cutting tool.** We reviewed 2 knives popular in the prepping community: [the Gerber LMF II and the Ka-Bar Becker 7](#). Don't skimp here and buy one of the cheap "Rambo" knives that is not a full tang knife which will break shortly after using it. Probably the most popular prepper/bushcraft knife is the [Ka-bar Becker BK 2](#). They're built like a tank and fit for the job of survival.
2. **Combustion.** The ability to start a fire is critical. Fire serves many purposes (keeping your core temperature up in cold conditions, cooking, etc.) and it's something you'll definitely need if you're going to be stuck out in the elements for any period of time. In my B.O.B. I carry [storm proof matches](#) and as a backup I have a [flintsteel firestarter](#).
3. **Cover.** In my opinion this should be #1 on your list of items to have in your B.O.B. You're not going to last long in the elements if you have don't some way to protect yourself against the elements. Having spent many years mountain climbing, getting stuck in storms is no fun (well, it can be if you have the right gear). If you don't have the ability to protect yourself from the elements, you're not going to last long. I personally choose a [rain tarp](#) for my B.O.B. (lighter and smaller than a tent).
4. **Container.** Carrying water is critical (especially if you live in the desert like me). Having a water container that can be used to boil water is an extra bonus. I have the [Klean Kanteen](#) water bottle on my bag in addition to my camelbak [water bladder](#) and an additional [2 liter water storage](#). Like shelter, water is is something that is critical for survival. You're not going to last long without it.

5. **Cordage.** Carrying a good 100' feet of 550 [paracord](#) is a smart idea. It's lightweight and can be very useful for many applications.
6. **Candle** (a.k.a. flashlight). I like a good [headlamp](#). It frees your hands up and wherever you turn your head to look, the light is going to shine in that direction. Having light is so important for my B.O.B. that I carry a few backups. One in particular, the [Eton Scorpion](#), serves as both a flashlight, has a hand crank charger that can charge your cell phone, and has a radio and a small solar panel to charge it.
7. **Cotton.** Having some type of bandana can serve many purposes. I did some [NGO work in Afghanistan](#) years ago and before leaving I purchased about 10 [shemaghs](#) which I have placed in all my B.O.B.'s and vehicle EDC bags. These can serve many purposes from head covering in hot weather, wrapping around your neck in cold weather, filtering water, helping start a fire, wrapping a broken bone to a signaling flag.
8. **Compass.** Getting lost can be dangerous. How often have you seen news reports of people that got lost in the woods that ended up going in circles? Having the ability to quickly orient yourself and follow a direction is critical. A [compass](#) is small, cheap and can be a real lifesaver.
9. **Cargo tape.** Strong duct tape can solve many problems in a cinch. Have a pack problem? Tape it up. The uses are almost endless. How much you carry is up to you, but having a roll of [Gorilla tape](#) is a good idea for those moments when something gets busted.
10. **Canvas needle.** Also sometimes referred to as a "sail needle", [these needles](#) can come in handy to sew up torn articles of clothing or gear.

3. What gear should I add to my bag?

Now that we've covered the reasons for and the foundations for a B.O.B., let's get into some other items you'll want to have when setting up your B.O.B.

As mentioned at the beginning of this document, there's no one perfect B.O.B. setup. Every person has different regional issues and physical issues they must consider. So while you're putting together your own bag, consider items you may specifically need. Here are the items (apart from the 10 C's listed above) I have in my bag (most of these items are also in my wife's B.O.B.):

- [Emergency sleeping bag](#). These are light weight, small and inexpensive. If you live in a colder climate, you may consider a [full-size sleeping bag](#). I keep my sleeping bag by my B.O.B. during the winter since it can get cold in my area, but the rest of the year it's not really needed. The emergency sleeping bag will work fine for my climate.
- [Wetfire](#). If you need to get a fire going quickly, this will do the job. Also see my notes above about the [stormproof matches](#) and flint steel [fire starter](#) I have. The ability to start a fire in a bug out situation serves many crucial purposes.
- Batteries. I have a few different things that need batteries in my bag, the most important of which is my flashlight. Ideally it helps when all your electronics running on the same type of batteries (i.e. AAA) so that you only have to carry one type of battery. Side note: when storing your electronics in your pack (i.e. flashlights, 2 way radios, etc.), don't leave the batteries in these devices as they may experience corrosion and destroy your device. Instead store the batteries separately in a ziplock bag. I bunch my together with a rubber band so they aren't touching end to end. While not probable, I don't want to risk my batteries causing a spark or fire. A [quick search on Google](#) shows the culprits are usually 9 volt batteries, but I'd prefer to avoid risking it.
- [Energy bars](#). Try to find a balanced bar. Something that is not all sugar but is rather balanced with protein, fat and carbs. Having 4 or 5 of these in your pack can help if you're on the move or just need something for a simple morale booster.

- [Snares](#). You can easily make a few of these to stow in your pack. They're small and barely take up any space or add weight and could provide an opportunity to snag a meal. [Just be sure you know how to use them](#).
- [Rain gear](#).
- [MRE's](#). I carry a few of these in my pack. If you need to cook a meal quickly, these are awesome. They come with their own built-in heater to warm up your food, so it's great to have a few of these.
- [Mountain house meals](#). There's a lot of variation on these types of freeze-dried meals you can quickly heat up with hot water. They're very lightweight and provide a balanced meal. While we're on the subject of food, you need to consider your calorie intake. If you're on the move, a minimum of 2200 calories for the typical person per day is a good number to shoot for (which is very low). Ideally you'll need a lot more if you're covering a lot of ground each day, but there's only so much space in your pack. I add up all the snack bars, MRE's and freeze dried food to about 2200 to 2500 calories a day.
- Food prepping/eating gear. There's an infinite number of configurations and options here, but for my bag, my goal is to be able to heat up water and have a utensil to eat with. I added a [Toaks titanium cup](#) which weighs next to nothing, a [Stanley Cook Camp set](#) and a [light my fire titanium spork](#).
- [Stove](#). While not necessary, I like having this in my bag if I need to heat up some water without starting a fire (in the event I don't want to be seen). Still, they're small, lightweight and with a small fuel canister, you can get some water boiling quickly.
- [Multi-tool knife](#). These come in handy in so many ways.
- [Medical kit](#) + [R.A.T.S Tourniquet](#) + [Israeli Bandage](#). You might be on your own for awhile. Having the right medical gear is critical. Not only do I want a basic medical kit, but having the ability to treat traumatic injuries is critical.
- [Whistle](#). Great for signaling.
- [Journal](#). Documenting important details you may need to retrieve later.

- [Monocular](#). Great for seeing things up close while keeping your distance.
- [Gloves](#). I carry these in my [E.D.C. bag](#) (that can be attached to my B.O.B.) and use these a lot.
- [Two way HAM radio](#). If cell phone towers go down, having a backup means of communication is very important.
- [Rescue Flash Mirror](#). If you're wanting to draw attention to yourself, this is great to get attention even when at a far away distance.
- [SAS Survival handbook](#). Knowledge is power and can help to ensure you can survive. I even have the [SAS app](#) on my phone.
- [Tush wipes](#). Like toilet paper but better.
- [Tent stakes](#) x 4. These can be used to tie down the rain tarp at the corners or could be used in a fire (already driven into the ground) to rest my pot on when boiling water.
- Alcohol hand wipes.
- Foldable air respirator.
- [Glow sticks](#). Great for light and great for signaling (attach one of these on the end of a 2 foot cord and swung around at night time can be seen far away).
- Chapstick.
- [USB thumb drive](#).
- [Super glue](#) (small).
- Cash (minimum \$20).
- [Carabiners](#).

4. How much can you add to your B.O.B.?

So obviously the [10 C's listed above](#) are a primer for the core essentials, but there's quite a few other items you're going to want to add in your pack which we detail in point #3. This is where weight comes into play. A good rule of thumb is that your pack shouldn't weigh more than 25% of your body weight. As a teenager I would go on

backpacking expeditions where we sometimes would carry up to 50 pounds or more of gear for a few weeks and at that time I barely weighed 120 pounds. So obviously you can carry more than 25% of your weight, but **you have to factor your physical condition**. Don't think you're going to have a 50 pound bag sitting in your closet you haven't carried in years that you can just throw on your back and head out. It's probably not going to be that easy.

While this document is not designed to go into detail about getting into shape and gaining strength, it's something you need to factor in nonetheless (I'll leave the how up to you) into how much you'll be able to carry.

5. How do I find the right bag for me?

The goal of any backpack is to keep the weight off your shoulders and squarely on your hips. REI produced a great [document](#) explaining how to find the right pack and properly load it.

There's quite a lot of options depending on budget and personal tastes. Here's a few I'd recommend that range from the low to the higher end:

- [TETON Sports Scout 3400 Internal frame](#). This bag definitely doesn't yell "Tactical!" and at \$57.00 (with stellar reviews on Amazon), this pack is hard to beat.
- [5.11 3 day Rush backpack](#). This is definitely a prepper favorite. In the \$136.00 price range, it's a solid backpack that many of our soldiers on deployment use and recommend.
- [Eberlestock HalfTrack Military Pack](#). On the higher end of the price range (around \$250), this pack is built like a tank and the attention to detail is impressive. Definitely one of those pieces of gear you know is going to last a

long time and is used by some of the military's special operations forces. If you have the money for this, you won't go wrong picking this up.

6. How much money will it cost to build a B.O.B.?

Price can vary depending on the type of gear you add and the level of quality you choose. For example, you may decide to use a cheaper fixed blade knife (i.e. [Morakniv knife](#)) instead of buying an [expensive one](#). While I suggest specific gear above, there's many options or alternatives. I've listed what's in my personal B.O.B., but remember, the best gear you can carry is the gear you own. You can easily spend thousands of dollars on a B.O.B. or keep the cost around \$150. There's no need to break the bank on a good B.O.B. but as in all things in life, quality gear doesn't come cheap and if my life depends on something working properly, I'm not always looking for cheap. If you have to skimp, don't skimp on the [core items](#).

7. Bugging out with children.

When having to leave your home, traveling with children can present various challenges. We try to break down the things you need to be aware of by age.

- **Infants (0 to 1 year old)**
 - This age group definitely presents some challenges if you're in a situation where you have to leave your home. While it will make things very difficult, remember that through history there have been groups that have found ways to survive (and even thrive) with infants.
 - **Transportation**
 - Obviously this age range has no mobility on their own but with [carriers](#), [slings](#) or [strollers](#) it is possible to transport them. A few

years ago my family and I traveled the United States for about a year and ½ in a RV. When we first went on the road our children were 2 and 4...very young. Many of the National Parks we visited were very large which is very tiring for a child at this age. With umbrella strollers, we were able to take our children literally everywhere. I remember one time we were in Yosemite climbing large hills pushing them and over all sorts of obstacles. On one occasion when we were in a BLM in Moab, Utah (in the middle of nowhere), pushing our children in strollers through some very tough terrain. My point is this: if your children are tiny, and you've already got a bag on your back, there's a good chance you'll have to either carry or push your child in a stroller. With a heavy load on your back, adding a child on your person may present some challenges (but not impossible). Remember, the Native Americans would carry their children in a papoose often strapped on their person so it is doable.

- **Food**

- If possible, breastfeeding is ideal but for some may not be possible. Having formula and bottles ready in a bag ready to grab at a moment's notice will be important. Remember: the water you add to the formula needs to be safe for drinking.

- **Gear**

- This age group will have several different items to be brought along to make sure their needs are met:

- Diapers
- Diaper rash cream
- Clothing to keep them warm
- Bottles (which you most definitely will need to keep sanitized)
- **Special Considerations**
 - Out of all the age groups, this one represents the most challenges as they require constant attention to prevent them from injuring themselves (think open fires in your campsite), they're unable to care for themselves and they're the hardest to stay mobile with. But remember, it is possible!
 - If you have children in this age group, do all you can to bug-in rather than bugging out.
- **Toddlers (2 to 5 years old)**
 - This age like infants will represent challenges in that they will require assistance moving from one location to the next and they're not yet able to carry their own gear. You'll also need to keep an eye on them as they will be unaware of the dangers that may be present in their environment. This is going to be a very traumatizing period for them and you'll probably be carrying them a lot as they'll probably be clingy and need reassurance that everything is going to be okay.
 - **Transportation**
 - As I mentioned above with Infants, we spent a long period of time on the road traveling the U.S. and were able to navigate even the

toughest of terrains with [strollers](#). At this age they may be somewhat mobile at this time, but count on having to either carry or push them in a stroller.

- **Knowledge**

- At this age you can begin to train and teach children basic skills to keep them safe. Teach them the dangers of bodies of water, insects and other potential hazards. Being forced out of your home forces you into an environment with plenty of safety issues and the sooner you educate your child, the better.

- **Gear**

- This age group doesn't have a lot of specific needs (assuming your child has no food allergies) but there's a few things you'll need to consider. They might be able to carry a very small pack at this age, but keep it very light. At most, you'll probably only be able to get clothes in their bag (assuming you're not carrying all their gear), potentially more if they're in the higher age range of this group.
 - Diapers
 - Some children are potty trained by around 2 but some are not. You'll definitely need to consider this as part of your gear in the event you have to leave quickly.
 - Toys
 - Non-electric: when we would travel with our little ones, we would usually buy them a new, simple toy to

keep them distracted. Plan to carry along a new or favorite toy or doll.

- Electric: most kids these days are already using tablet or mobile phones by this age. Be sure to have some way to recharge these devices, like a [hand crank flashlight](#) that can charge devices with a USB plugin.

- Comfort item

- This is going to be a very stressful time for them and having something familiar that gives them comfort (a toy, a blanket) will help reduce stress for everyone.

- Change of clothes

- Toiletries

- [Tush wipes](#), toilet paper, toothbrush and toothpaste.

- **Special Considerations**

- The biggest challenge with this age group is their need to communicate their frustrations through yelling or tantrums.

Remember, this is going to be a very traumatic time for this child that is used to thriving in the security of their home which has now been ripped away. Everything is new and they'll feel a lot of anxiety and fear. Try your best to go to areas where their yelling does not bring unwanted attention to your group.

- **School Aged Kids (6 to 10 years old)**

- At this age they can begin to carry very light loads and are at an age where a lot of development and learning begins. At best, they can do a

light amount of work (picking up firewood, helping around the camp, foraging, etc.), but don't expect a lot.

- **Transportation**

- This age group can begin to move on their own, although not as far as an adult. Remember, you have to be patient with this group. You can only push them so far before they get exhausted which will mean you'll have to end up carrying them.

- **Knowledge**

- This is an age where you can begin to introduce them to firearm safety and the basics of firearms and how to shoot. In addition, teach them how to use a compass, how to tie a knot. Make learning fun and they'll pick up skills which can be useful to the group.

- **Gear**

- This age group doesn't have a lot of specific needs (assuming your child has no food allergies) but there's a few things you'll need to consider. This age group can carry a little more gear than the toddler age, but be careful not to wear this child out. Things you'll want to consider to pack for them:

- [Sleeping bivy](#)
- Candy
- [Flashlight](#)
 - Batteries
- Smart phone

- Games will help keep them distracted. Be sure to have some way to recharge these devices, like [hand crank flashlight](#) that can charge devices with a USB plugin.
- Cup
- Utensils
- Deck of cards
- [Energy bars](#)
- Change of clothes
- Toiletries
 - [Tush wipes](#), toilet paper, toothbrush and toothpaste.
- **Special Considerations**
 - This age group doesn't have a lot of special considerations as they're now coming into an age where they're more mobile, independent and at a small level can begin helping out. Just remember to not push them too hard and exhaust them or you'll end up having to carry them.
- **Tween/Teens (10 to 18 years old)**
 - At this age they can begin to carry their own gear. You may need to find a pack with a smaller frame (for the younger age group), but don't be afraid to let them carry all their own survival gear. Be careful not to buy a cheap pack for them but rather something that is rugged enough for them to carry.
 - **Transportation**

- This age group can move on their own and often further than adults. By the time they reach about 14 years of age they typically have more endurance than many adults.
- **Knowledge**
 - This is an age where you can begin to introduce them to more powerful firearms. If they have a foundation of gun safety that has been established, they can begin to help with hunting and security in your group.
- **Gear**
 - This age group can carry their own full gear load out.
- **Special Considerations**
 - This group doesn't really have special considerations and by the age of 12 or 13 can begin contributing to the group at the same level as an adult.

8. Where to store bug out bags.

In the event I have to bug out, I have all my gear in one place so I can grab it and go. Again, the key is to not just have the gear scattered around your house but rather to have everything in one place so that if you have to head out quickly, you can without having to spend time you don't have trying to gather everything together.

I personally keep my gear in a closet near my garage. I have considered many times what bugging out will look like in my situation. If we were forced to flee our home, more likely than not we'll be leaving in our vehicles parked in our garage. Also I don't want my gear sitting out in plain site so I store our packs at the front of our closet.

9. Other items to have ready to support your bug out bag.

Having your bag ready means you have the gear ready to go on a moment's notice but I also keep other items that I'll need when I bug out nearby. For example, you'll want water when you have to head out, but keeping your water containers in your B.O.B. filled with water in storage is not advisable (as bacteria will develop). I keep the following gear stored alongside our B.O.B.'s:

- Water
 - 2 gallons (which I rotate monthly)
- Clothes
 - These get rotated based on the season. For myself I have a bucket next to my bag so I can simply grab it and go in the event of an emergency. In the bucket I have my boots, jackets (inner lining and outer shell), pants, underwear, long sleeve shirt, thick socks and a hat. Basically all the gear I need if I had to throw my pack on my back and start hiking.
- Firearms and ammunition
 - These are all locked up and secured but ready to be pulled from my gun safe.

10. Rotating gear in your bag and keeping it up to date.

Once you build your B.O.B. and set it up in a closet, you'll want to ensure the gear you have stored inside still does its job when it comes time to use it. As such, here are things you'll want to check on once every few months:

- Seasonal clothing

- Seasons change and so do the clothing you'll need. Check the clothing you have with your bag to ensure it matches the weather during that season.
- Food
 - The bulk of my food in my bag is [mountain house](#) which has a 12+ year shelf life. I also have some energy bars which need to be rotated from time to time.
- Batteries
 - We've all seen these corrode and damage either the item they're in or the items around them. As such, keep an eye on these to make sure you're not seeing any corrosion setting in on the contact points.
- Rust
 - If you have items in your backpack that could rust, i.e. a knife, be sure to visually inspect them from time to time. In the example of a knife, you want to make sure you haven't left any types of contaminants on your knife's blade that could cause it to rust. Typically you want to store these in a cool dry place with a light coat of mineral oil.

Set a calendar reminder to check the gear in your bag 3 or 4 times a year to make sure everything is in working order. The time to check it all out is not when you need it but in advance.

11. Testing your bug out bag.

Having what you think is the right gear is a start, but actually testing it out is a completely different thing.

Know thy gear!

After having spent my teenage years camping/backpacking on a monthly basis, I became familiar with my gear and learned what worked and what didn't. Some piece of gear that you thought was going to be so awesome is worthless and is just a dead weight. The more you use things, the faster you learn what works and what does not and you make adjustments.

Now imagine being forced out of your home and potentially having to flee on foot requiring you to survive with the gear you're carrying. If you haven't taken the time to get to know and try out your gear, you might be in for an unpleasant surprise if you're unfamiliar with setting up that tent or understanding how to properly use your gear.

Find a weekend where you can go overnight to try out your gear. Find someone place like a camping ground where you have the safety and security around you that if some of your gear doesn't work properly, you still are within range of help if you need it. Once you feel comfortable with this gear, try a different weekend where you hike a mile or two to a campsite (preferably with a friend). Again, test the gear there as well without the conveniences offered by a campground (i.e. running water or a bathroom). The more you use your gear, the more confident you will become that if an emergency situation, you have the proper gear to save your life. Nothing creates more anxiety than uncertainty and getting to know your gear very well allows you to rest well knowing you'll be ready.

12. Know where you're going...have a plan.

Sometimes you may not have many options as to where you can go to in the event of a catastrophe in your area. But it's always a good idea to have a plan A, B, C, etc. Be flexible and adjust as you gain information. Flexibility is an attribute you'll need in times of stress. Situations out of your control may force you to make changes you may not have considered before. For example, your escape route from your area may be

impassable forcing you to follow alternative routes. Before you're in this situation, research and come up with alternative routes. Just remember, the people in your area will probably be taking the typical routes as well, so if possible, try to avoid these as they probably will be jammed very quickly. Learn the back roads and other places that are not on the beaten path.

When I lived in Los Angeles back in 2001, I was traveling with a friend down to San Diego to a wedding rehearsal dinner. We were traveling south on the 405 freeway when a bank heist had occurred and the freeways were put on lockdown. We sat on the freeway for more than an hour at which point traffic was re-routed. All the traffic was re-routed to a 2 lane highway over a mountain range forcing us to crawl for hours before we could get to another freeway. Fortunately we made it to San Diego (albeit 4 hours late) but in a time of catastrophe expect far more people to be on the road causing traffic jams which could last for hours. Remember when [Hurricane Rita](#) was barreling down on Houston and everyone was told to leave? People were stuck in traffic for quite a long time running out of gas and as you can imagine the hotels were booked up along the evacuation route. Think in advance of alternative evacuation routes assuming most of the major freeways will probably be jammed.

Along with knowing where you're going, consider your vehicles. I personally have a 4x4 truck along with a 4 door sedan. In a situation where we'd be forced to leave, we'd take both as they both have advantages. If we get stuck in traffic and the roads are jammed, we'd probably be forced to do a little off-roading and find alternative routes. Here's a simple everyday tip: keep your vehicle's gas tanks always $\frac{1}{2}$ full (at a minimum). I'm a bit O.C.D. so I always keep my truck at least $\frac{3}{4}$ full. You may not be able to refuel (what happens when there's no electricity to pump the gas?) while heading out so always be prepared.

In addition, be sure to have alternative forms of communication apart from just cell phones. If the cell towers go down and you get split up while heading out (in the event you are in 2 vehicles), having options like 2 way radios or [H.A.M. radios](#) are critical.

But this is the beauty of having a B.O.B. for you and your individual family members: it gives you more flexibility and options as to where you'll go because you'll have the necessary gear to make adjustments.