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CHOOSING A SLEEPING BAG

Crawling into a sleeping bag that you know is going to be warm and comfortable is one of the singular pleasures of backcountry adventure. Just as a good sleeping bag can make for a good night's sleep, an ill-suited one can spell discomfort or worse.

TEMPERATURE RATINGS

Decide where and when you're likely to use a bag. This will help determine if you need a winter, 3-season, or summer bag. Compare each bag's individual temperature rating. Ratings give a general idea of insulating performance and are a useful point of comparison. We believe our temperature ratings are realistic for most people in most conditions. Choose a warmer bag if you tend to sleep cold. We also have some tips on sleeping warm in our Staying Warm article.

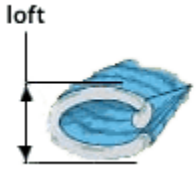
FILL TYPE COMPARISON

Fill	Weight	Compactability	Durability	Warmth When Wet	Loft
Hyperloft	**	**	***	***	***
Down	****	****	****	-	****

**** Excellent *** Very Good ** Fair - Not Applicable

For more information, please read about Down and Synthetic Fills.

LOFT



Loft is a key factor in determining a bag's warmth. It refers to the thickness or puffiness of a bag. If two bags have the same fill type, features, and shape, the one with the higher loft will be warmer. For information on measuring a sleeping bag's warmth, see our article on Sleeping Bag Ratings and Standards Tests.

SHAPE

A sleeping bag's shape can dramatically affect its performance. It will also impact how comfortable it is to sleep in and how small its packed size will be.

MUMMY

Mummy bags are designed to save weight and maximize heat retention. They narrow at the feet, flare out at the shoulders, then taper to a fitted hood. With less space for your body to heat, a close-fitting bag has superior warmth to weight than a roomier bag. However, some people find them too constricting.

SHOP MUMMY SLEEPING BAGS

BARREL

Barrel bags trade thermal efficiency for extra room. They have no hood, are slightly tapered, and incorporate a patterned oval foot section. They are slightly heavier and bulkier than mummy bags.

SHOP BARREL SLEEPING BAGS

RECTANGULAR

Rectangular bags are suitable for warm weather, and are not the best choice for most backcountry travellers. Although inexpensive and roomy, they let a lot of body heat escape and are heavy and bulky for the insulation they provide.

SHOP RECTANGULAR SLEEPING BAGS

FEATURES AND CONSTRUCTION

HOOD AND NECK YOKE

You lose 30 to 50 percent of your heat through your head and neck. A well-patterned hood is roomy yet contoured, and significantly increases a bag's warmth without adding much weight. The neck yoke is an insulated collar that covers your throat and shoulders. It reduces heat loss whether the bag is snugged down or loosely zipped. Some bags have a neck and muff combination that completely encircles the neck for additional warmth.

FOOTBOX AND FOOT OVAL

Feet and toes crush insulation. To compensate, mummy bags have square-shaped footboxes that allow for natural foot positions. The less-tailored equivalent in a barrel bag is called a foot oval. Extra insulation at the peak of the footbox or foot oval helps warm your toes.

ZIPPER AND DRAFT TUBE

Lefties generally prefer right-hand opening bags and vice versa. If you are planning to zip two bags together, ensure one has a right zip and one has a left zip. An insulated tube that runs behind the zipper to prevent heat loss is called a draft tube. Ideally, it is sewn only to the lining material, since sewing through the bag creates a cold spot.

CONSTRUCTION METHODS

Sleeping bag construction methods vary in cost and the benefits each provide.

Sewn-through is used in lightweight or warm-weather synthetic or down bags, it is inexpensive to construct, but can have cold spots at quilt lines.

Offset Quilt is used for synthetic bags only. It has no cold spots at quilt lines and is less expensive than shingled construction.

Shingles are used for synthetic bags only. It is the most warmth-to-weight efficient construction, but is more expensive than offset quilt.

Baffles are used in down bags only. They feature mesh partitions at quilt lines to prevent cold spots and keep down from migrating through the bag. Expensive, but very warm.

SLEEPING PADS

A sleeping pad is the foundation of your sleeping system. A pad cushions you against the hard ground, and keeps you warm by forming a thermal barrier between the ground and your sleeping bag. Without a sleeping pad, conduction draws heat out of your sleeping bag into the cold ground. The result? Your sleeping bag's performance is compromised, and you experience a colder night's sleep.

The warmth of a sleeping pad is indicated by its R-value. R-value measures a material's resistance (R) to heat loss. Higher numbers indicate greater warmth. If you're snow camping, consider combining an inflatable pad with a closed-cell pad. Two pads provide better cushioning, insulation, and protection from accidental punctures. The combination will also help keep moisture away from your sleeping bag.

CLOSED-CELL FOAM

BLUE FOAM

Inexpensive blue foam is reasonably durable, and it insulates well. Although all blue foam looks much the same, its quality varies. Squeeze the foam between your thumb and forefinger. Inferior foam will spring back slowly, if at all.

YELLOW FOAM

Yellow foam (Evazote® is the best-known brand name) is stronger than blue foam and remains flexible to –70 degrees Celsius. It is also resistant to damage from abrasion and ultraviolet light.

RIDGED-FOAM

Some closed-cell foam pads feature moulded-in hinges and contoured ridges. The hinges make for easy packing, while the ridges increase cushioning and insulation without increasing weight.

SELF-INFLATING PADS

Self-inflating pads are more expensive than closed-cell foam pads, but they insulate well and are light and compact. Most contain open-cell foam, which is an excellent insulator when filled with air. Some include a layer of down or synthetic material, which adds warmth, but should be protected from water and dampness.

When inflating a foam-filled pad, it's best to open the valve and allow the pad to self-inflate. Add a few breaths later if required (or use the pump system on a down-filled pad). This will prevent moisture from accumulating inside.

Store your pad unfurled and with the valve open. If required, you can wipe off dirt with a damp cloth and allow the pad to air dry. Never store your sleeping pad if it is damp, dampness encourages mildew. You can repair a punctured pad with a dab of urethane glue or a simple patch. Read Sleeping Pad Repair for info about locating and sealing holes.