

How to Stay Dry in Your Camping Shelter

Many people have trouble staying dry while camping in their tent or tarp shelters. Here are some tips that may help:

Tents:

- First, it is important to understand that fabric used in manufacturing tents is neither airtight nor waterproof. This is essential for two reasons: (1) the porous fabric helps allow condensation to escape from the interior, and (2) the people inside need oxygen! But this fact means we need to take extra steps to keep rain and ground moisture from getting inside.
- Most tents are "double walled." That means there is a rain fly that goes over the interior cabin. When correctly setup, the tent frame creates an air space between the rainfly and the interior cabin wall's fabric. This air space is very important. When setting up your double-walled tent, make certain that your rain fly does not touch the wall of the interior cabin. If it does touch, rainwater will seep through the rainfly at that spot and go through the wall of the interior cabin. You will get drips, drips, and more drips!
- Most tents have a "footpad" that goes under the tent's floor. Use it. The footpad gives you added protection from ground moisture and protects the tent floor from being damaged by the dirt.
- Before your campout and while you are at home, buy a bottle of liquid "seam sealer" from a camping supply store. Apply the sealer as directed to the underside of the rainfly surface, and to the bottom of the tent's footpad. Be extra careful to apply sealer to any spots where there is stitching. Stitching creates holes in the fabric; you want to block those up as much as you can.
- Eventually seam sealer wears off. After you have used your tent on many campouts, re-apply your sealer.

Tarps:

- As I mentioned in Backyard Bushcraft issue #13, there are at least 50 to 100 different ways to set up a tarp for use as a camping shelter. Some designs are well-suited for wind or rain, while others work better in summer or winter temperatures. Select a setup design that best matches the kind of weather you anticipate during your campout. It is a good idea to learn several setup designs, just in case you get surprised by weather changes during your camping trip! 😊

Tent and Tarp Shelters:

- Put a plastic shower curtain liner as a base protection layer under your tarp or tent footpad. If you are in a tarp, spread a thermal "space blanket" directly over the shower curtain liner, shiny side up. (See photo below.) The shiny side will reflect body heat back to you, which will help keep you warm. The shiny surface also will reflect light from your flashlight, which makes it easier to see things at night.
- If you are using a tent with a floor, simply spread the space blanket inside the tent, shiny side up.
- By the way, the space blanket can be adjusted to block wind or provide extra warmth during very cold winter campouts.
- Spread your sleeping pad and sleeping bag on top of the space blanket.
- Make certain that the plastic shower curtain, footpad and space blanket do not extend outside the boundaries of tent or tarp. If any of these 3 layers stick out and you get rain, the water will travel along these surfaces and get inside your shelter.

In the picture shown below, you can see my shower curtain (black plastic in the photo), space blanket, and sleeping pad laid out under a tarp. (I turned corners back to better show how the protective layers work.) These 3 layers should protect me and my gear from ground moisture while I am in my sleeping bag:

