

HOW TO BUILD
THE ULTIMATE

DISASTER
SURVIVAL

KIT



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Introduction

Ever since the dawn of time, mankind has been faced with disasters. Earthquakes, forest fires, hurricanes and drought have hindered man's life and at times even taken it away. We can't just blame Mother Nature, either, as we humans are experts in creating our own disasters. Mankind has caused everything from financial crises to war, hindering our own best efforts—even to the point where it can seem we're back to the caveman's essential struggle for survival.

To say that those disasters can't or won't strike us is as foolish as living the life of an ostrich, sticking our collective heads in the sand to pretend the predator doesn't exist. Just because we don't see any reason today to believe that a disaster is right around the corner doesn't mean that one isn't there. Many disasters strike without warning, giving little to no time to prepare.

In times past, people lived in such a way that they were more prepared to deal with disasters. They might not have had the technology that we have available today, but they had something much more important: self-reliance. Modern man has become too dependent upon government institutions, expecting them to take care of citizens when a crisis strikes. Unfortunately, governments around the world have uniformly shown their inability to do that.

Our ancestors were more prepared than we are only because they lived in close proximity to disaster. Their manner of life lent itself to being better prepared for face daily challenges to their lives. They stockpiled food for the winter, dug their own well for water, built their own shelters from storms, and had the weapons to defend themselves from both two-legged and four-legged predators.

Our ancestors had two distinct advantages over us: They were mentally prepared, and they were physically prepared. Of the two, mental preparation is actually the most difficult to achieve. Anyone can stockpile food so that they have something to eat if the store shelves are empty, or spend time working out to be strong enough to cross

mountains if necessary to survive. But not just anyone knows where to get water when city water stops flowing.

This doesn't minimize the importance of having the right equipment and supplies on hand. Any survival instructor will tell you that having certain tools can make the difference between life and death. Even the most die-hard survivalist recognizes that it's easier to start a fire with a match than by rubbing sticks together.

While this book focuses on putting together the right supplies to survive a disaster, it's also important to know how to use those supplies. If you don't know how to build a fire, it doesn't matter how many matches you have; you're not going to be warm. Building a fire is an important survival skill—one that isn't as much a part of everyday life as it used to be.

The other factor that makes a difference is where you are. If you are at home, your survival needs will be much different than if you are 100 miles away from your comfort zone. You're going to have more resources available to you at home. While those may not be survival resources per se, they will be useful to survive. When you are away from home, however, you're stuck with just the things that you carried along. In those cases, the terrain and climate of where you are will play an important factor in determining what you need to have in order to survive.

Let's start by putting the most important item into our survival kit: awareness. Becoming aware of what is going on around us is critical. At times, it can help us to avoid a disaster; other times, it can save us from that critical time of adjusting to the circumstances. The ability to start reacting before the crisis strikes can often make all the difference in the world.

The second thing I want to add to our survival kit is a "can do" attitude. Doctors and nurses can attest from experience that one of the biggest differences between a cancer victim living and dying is their attitude. Anyone convinced who the cancer will kill them is more likely to die, while those who are convinced that they can overcome the disease can often stand a fighting chance. The same holds true of police officers and soldiers

who are shot in the line of duty. Many who were lightly wounded in an arm or leg have died because they gave up the will to fight. On the other hand, people who have received multiple life-threatening wounds have managed to survive.

Your awareness and your attitude will make more of a difference than anything else you can put in your survival kit. Prepare them well, and keep them with you at all times. Even if you don't have a piece of equipment that you might need, you'll have the resourcefulness to find another way.

You will survive.

Before you read any further, check out this video that shows some of the best disaster plans tailor-made to individual families. It will give you a good baseline to start developing your own emergency plan as you read through the e-book and organize your survival kit. Watch the free video now.

Important Video: Disaster Plan Secrets for Families

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What Does it Take to Survive?

If you ask the average person on the street what tools they need to survive when disaster strikes, they're likely to answer with something they think they need every day, like "my cell phone," than they are with the things that are really needed for survival. It's too easy not to take the needs for survival seriously because it's not something we usually have to think about. Instead our minds focus on the things that make our lives enjoyable, not the items necessary to survive.

On the most basic level, survival means keeping your body alive, not keeping your life comfortable. There aren't really many things your body needs to satisfy that goal, although each and every one is critical for survival. In order of importance, your body needs:

- Oxygen
- Homeostasis (maintaining body temperature)
- Water
- Food

The priority is rated by how long the human body can live without them. You can only live for a few minutes without oxygen, but for our purposes, we can pretty much assume that oxygen will be available, considering how much of it is in the air around us. Should that oxygen disappear, your best efforts would add mere hours to your life without finding a new source.

The second biggest need is homeostasis, the maintenance of your body temperature. A change of only a couple of degrees higher or lower in body temperature will drastically reduce your ability to function, and a change of a few degrees beyond that will kill you. Someone who falls overboard from a ship into freezing water only has minutes to live. If they are not removed from the water and warmed back up to a safe temperature range, their chances are slim. Hypothermia, the loss of body heat, is one of the biggest killers in the wild.

There are several things that can be done to maintain body temperature, most commonly clothing and shelter. Clothing and accessories, like gloves and hats, insulate the body so that heat isn't lost as quickly. Shelter provides an environment that protects us from the elements, especially cold. We heat our homes not only for comfort, but to help our bodies maintain optimal temperature.

Without water, you can only survive about three days before the dehydration becomes killer. Figures vary for how much of the human body is made up of water. Depending on where you get your information from, it can be from about 50 percent to over 70 percent. These differences come about from the different methods that are being used to calculate the percentage of water; not all types of cells have the same amount of water, making it difficult to determine the actual water content of the body as a whole. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that it contains a lot of water. Without it, life cannot continue.

Most survival experts say that it takes a minimum of one gallon of water per day to survive. This one gallon is supposed to provide for both drinking and cooking (not cleaning). However, the conditions you're stuck in can change those requirements. In moderate temperatures, that one gallon might be enough, but in a hot climate, you have to figure on two gallons per person per day. You can sweat out more than a gallon per day of water on a hot day, especially if you are doing physical work or trekking around outside.

Food is an important necessity as well, although it ranks at the bottom of the list. The average person can live for about 30 days without food. While your energy level might suffer without sustenance, you will still be able to function. Anyone who makes it past 30 days will see rapid decline in functioning, even if they still have fat reserves.

A disaster survival kit needs to meet these needs to be effective and must include:

- Ways of starting a fire to maintain body temperature (also needed for cooking)
- Shelter, or means of constructing a shelter
- Water, or ways of purifying water

- Food, or ways of catching or foraging food

How well the survival kit does these things depends upon the size of the kit, where it is intended to be used and the survival skills of the person who has the kit. A kit that is intended for carrying with you can't possibly contain enough food and water to survive for a week, although it can contain the necessary equipment for fishing and purifying water. Of course, in places where water is scarce, fishing supplies may not be as useful as hunting supplies.

Having survival equipment without the knowledge to use it is worthless. As I mentioned earlier, it doesn't matter how many matches a person has; if he or she can't build a fire, those matches aren't going to do them much good. On the other hand, someone with strong survival skills can get by with less, as he or she knows how to improvise with what's available.

Since each of these needs is so important, redundancy is important as well. If you only have one means of purifying water and lose that means, you might die of dysentery. Therefore, it makes sense to have an alternate means of purifying water. The same applies to all of these basic needs.

Situations vary. While the best possible survival situation is to be caught at home when a disaster strikes, things don't always work out that way. Therefore, it is a good idea to have a home disaster survival kit and an away-from-home disaster survival kit. In both instances, prepare for the worst possible disaster that you can imagine hitting you. That way, your preparations will suffice for all lesser disasters as well.

This book takes an in-depth look at the needs for both home and portable disaster survival kits. Please keep in mind that some of this is subjective. What one person needs may not be the same as what another needs; therefore, each person must customize a survival kit to meet their needs. Items can change depending upon:

- Local climate
- The type of disasters likely in that region

- Age
- Gender
- Level of survival training
- Physical condition and strength

Ultimately, you must decide for yourself what you actually need in order to survive. Your final kit may look quite different than mine. That's okay just as long as it works for you. You're the one who is going to have to use it to stay alive in a worst-case scenario so take your personal needs into account.

Surviving at Home

Surviving a disaster at home is easier than surviving one anywhere else. Not only does your home provide you with shelter—thus satisfying needs #1 and #2—but you have pretty much everything you own all in one place. There is no way that you can carry as much survival gear with you when you are away from home as you will have when you are safe on your own turf.

Nevertheless, survival at home is still a challenge that requires adequate preparation and training. While you may have everything you own in one place, there's a good chance that you won't have some things available to you that you are used to having. In most disasters, the normal infrastructure is severely damaged, eliminating services regularly taken for granted, such as electrical power and fresh water. Additionally, supply chains are compromised, which means running down to the corner store to buy something you need is out of the question.

To properly prepare a disaster survival kit for your home, you must first take into consideration the worst disaster you are likely to face. There is no sense in preparing for a situation that you aren't likely to see, like a tsunami in the desert, nor is there much sense in preparing for anything less than the worst-case scenario. If you prepare for the worst situation possible in your life, then you will have everything you need on hand to survive a lesser calamity.

For the sake of this book, we're going to assume that the worst-case situation is a hurricane or tornado that disrupts electrical power, water supplies, communications and supply chains. Due to the lack of supplies, there is a breakdown in society, and looting and violence abound.

The next thing to figure out is the amount of time that will pass before life resumes as usual. It takes time to restore essential services when they are disrupted. A hurricane may pass through an area in 24 hours, but it could also be days or even weeks before life returns to its regular state.

The easiest way to determine how rapidly your life can return to normal is by looking at the aftermath of previous disasters. How quickly were government agencies able to react? How long did it take to restore electrical power? How many days (or weeks) passed before stores had the standard level of stock back on the shelves? All this information is available, although it might take some work to uncover.

The answers to those questions tell us how long of a time we need to be prepared for. In most cases, it's not surviving the disaster that's the toughest part; it's surviving the aftermath while things are being restored to how they were before the storm hit.

How Your Home Helps You

Besides the shelter that your home provides you, there are a number of other advantages of being caught at home in a disaster. More than anything, it provides your family with a safe place to congregate and support one another. Being in familiar surroundings helps maintain a semblance of normalcy, even though the situation may be anything but. Nevertheless, those creature comforts can give your family confidence to overcome the situation.

Don't underestimate the value of making your family feel comfortable as well as feeling that things are at least somewhat normal. The hardest part of surviving any disaster is the psychological strain. People who are comfortable will be better prepared to confront the problems that are associated with a disaster and its aftermath. Take a group that waited out a long, difficult storm at home and throw them into unfamiliar surroundings, and their chances of survival will be drastically reduced.

With the right preparation, your home can do much more for you than provide shelter. While all homes are limited as to how much storage space they have, a house or apartment can pack away much more food and supplies than what you could carry on your back.

Of course, the more you do to prepare your home for disasters, the better off you will be when and if a disaster strikes. For example, if you have stockpiled food and water, then when a disaster takes away water service, you'll at least have a week's water to drink.

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You might not have enough to last you forever, but you'll be much better off than those that haven't stored a single bottle.

What to Do When the Lights Go Out

Since most disasters result in the loss of essential services, we must assume that whatever disaster strikes your family will leave you without electrical service, fresh water from the tap, sewer service and food from the grocery store. The more you can do beforehand to prepare for the loss of these services, the better off you'll be.

You might think that electricity is mostly important for the television set and your computer, but we use electricity for many more critical things like heating and cooling, refrigeration and lighting. In addition, both city water services and a private well on your property depend upon electrical power to supply your family with water. So, to fully prepare your home, it is necessary to develop a plan for dealing with the loss of electricity and water.

The first part of this is providing heat in the home. Modern heating is either electrical or gas. Even in cases where gas is used, the controls are electric. Luckily, humans heated their homes for centuries before the invention of modern central systems, and we can return to those methods, like fireplaces and wood-burning stoves. While not as convenient as central heating, a good old-fashioned fire will heat a home. If it is impossible to install one of these heat sources in your home, a portable kerosene heater will do.

The second need is for water. The average person needs a gallon of water per day in moderate temperatures and two gallons in hot temperatures. (This quantity doesn't account for what is needed for personal hygiene, which can be several gallons per day.)

Drinking water can be stockpiled. However, even the best stockpile will eventually give out. Therefore, it's a good idea to have a means of filtering water as well. That way, available water supplies from nearby streams, lakes and rainwater can be filtered and used for drinking water. Be sure to make note of what nearby water supplies are available.

Refrigeration is the third necessity that is lost when electrical power is out. There are two ways to respond to this: use up the food that you have in the refrigerator ASAP, or provide alternative refrigeration. The latter can be accomplished through evaporative cooling.



The zeer cooler is a means of keeping food via evaporative cooling. This simple yet ancient device consists of two clay pots that nest inside of each other. The space between them is filled with sand, and the sand is wetted. Since the clay of the pots is porous, the water in the sand will wick towards the outside of the outer pot, where it can evaporate, cooling the entire zeer, including its contents. Covering the zeer with a wet cloth helps the process as well by adding additional cooling and insulating the contents from the ambient temperature.

What You Need to Stock

Besides learning survival skills, the biggest part of preparing to face a disaster is stockpiling the necessary supplies for your disaster kit. For most people, building a kit is a prolonged process as they don't have the money to buy everything at once. That's okay just as long as you start on the journey now before it's too late. The sooner you start, the sooner you will be well-stocked in the event that disaster strikes.

While a home survival kit could contain literally anything and everything, from obvious options like food and water to means of entertainment like puzzles and books, there are some items which are important for any situation. We're going to concentrate on these absolute essentials.

Water

Since you can only survive three days without it, you'll need a lot of water to survive. The problem with storing water is that it takes up a lot of space. Nobody has successfully invented instant or dehydrated water so you have to store big bottles of it, kept away from direct sunlight to prevent the growth of algae. One gallon of purified water per person per day is a minimum for drinking and cooking, which means a week's supply is seven gallons per person in your household. Additional cleaning water would be needed in order to maintain personal hygiene.

Water purification

Since storing sufficient water is difficult, it's a good idea to have some means of purifying it. The easiest is a mechanical filter. There are a number of excellent filters on the market designed specifically for survival situations. These are much more robust filters than the commonplace pitchers and faucet attachments used for filtering minerals out of a home water supply. A survival filter is specifically designed to remove bio-hazards, such as bacteria.

A 2.0 micron filter will remove pretty much all bacteria, protozoa and other parasites from the water. For greater security, a 0.2 micron filter will remove viruses as well. At this level of filtration, you can take pretty much any water that is not chemically contaminated and make it safe to drink. (Removing chemical contaminants like lead and copper requires distilling the water or using a complex process like reverse osmosis.)

Food

You will need enough food to see your family through the disaster and its aftermath. Since you won't be able to count on refrigeration, choose foods that are dried, cured, pickled or canned. You can even buy "survival food," which is pre-packed in five gallon plastic buckets, providing everything you need to feed your family for several days; this is a convenient but rather expensive way to go.

It isn't necessary to spend a lot of money on that specialized survival food. A trip through any grocery store will offer a wide variety of foods packaged in a way that makes them perfect for survival needs. Develop a menu based upon what you can readily find, and pack enough of it away to get your family through the expected period of disaster recovery.

Stored foods will last for a number of years. How long they actually last depends a lot on how they are packaged. Aside from canning, the packaging used for store-bought foods isn't intended for long-term food storage. Later on we'll go over how to repack foods so that they will last for a minimum of ten years in storage.

Means of Cooking

If your electricity is out, there's a good chance that your normal means of food preparation will be out as well. Even if you have a gas stove, you can't count on it because the pumping station for the gas may no longer be operating. The only type of stove which is likely to work in a time of crisis is propane.

Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that you are without means of cooking your food. A little ingenuity will make it possible for you to cook. For most people, the easiest secondary means of cooking food is on a barbecue grill. Since most families have one of these, they make a great secondary means of cooking in a pinch. Just be sure to keep enough of a stock of fuel for the grill so that it will get you through a crisis.

In addition to cooking on the grill, you can always resort to the old-fashioned means of cooking over an open fire. Mankind did this for centuries with excellent results. While it may not be as easy or consistent as cooking on a stove, roasting meat and veggies over an open fire is not all that hard with a little practice.

Fire Starters

If you're going to have to cook over an open fire, you'll need to have ample means of starting a fire on hand. Starting a wood fire is best done in stages. A fire starter is used first of all; matches and butane lighters work well for this. The matches or lighter are

used to start your kindling—any material that will easily burn—on fire. Kindling is defined as something that can start smoldering from a single spark.

There are a number of readily available fire starters on the market. These are essentially different types of well-prepared kindling. They all work fairly well, but you can make your own easily enough. Cotton balls soaked in petroleum jelly are one of the easiest fire starters to work with.

Once burning, the kindling is used to start tinder burning. Tinder is sticks that are under an inch in diameter. It helps to have broken, ragged ends to the sticks because it is much easier to get those ends burning than it is to get the bark to light. The tinder will produce enough of a flame to put split logs on the fire as fuel.

Candles & Oil-Burning Lamps

Since we're assuming electric power will be out, you will need an alternate source of light. There are several solutions, but the best is to go old-fashioned with candles and oil-burning lamps. These store well, don't cost a lot and don't require electricity to operate.

When selecting candles, look for ones in a glass jar, such as a canning jar, or wide enough candles so that the wax won't drip. Taper candles are elegant, but typically waste more wax dripping down the sides of the candle onto the table than they burn. You want the candles to burn slow and steady for as long as possible, not to instantly become a puddle of wax.

The nice thing about oil-burning lamps is that they can be used with pretty much any type of oil. The oil that is sold for them is designed to burn smoke-free and not produce a bad odor. In many cases, it's scented, but in an emergency, any lightweight oil can be used, from cooking oil to motor oil. The only thing to be careful of is that some of these oils will produce soot, which could stain the ceiling of your home.

Flashlights

Even with the candles and oil lamps, flashlights are extremely useful. If you have to go outside or perform repairs on something, a flashlight will serve you much better than a candle ever will. Headlamp-style flashlights are extremely useful for repairs because they're hands-free and always shine the light right where you are looking.

Tactical flashlights have become extremely popular for survival situations. They are made of machined aluminum, making them much stronger than a plastic flashlight. In many cases they are smaller and easier to keep in your pocket. These flashlights are also waterproof, which is an additional advantage over standard models. Some of these lights are extremely bright, making them useful for lighting up an area or for momentarily stunning an attacker.

While more expensive, the tactical flashlights provide one major advantage: LED lights. LEDs can't burn out or break, like conventional incandescent bulbs often do. The newer LED flashlights are also much brighter. But the biggest advantage of these lights is that the batteries last much longer than conventional flashlights.

Batteries

Of course, if you are going to have flashlights, you need batteries as well. However, that's not the only thing you use regularly that needs batteries. Having a stock of batteries, especially AA and AAA sizes, can make your life much more comfortable.

The other thing you need batteries for is your cell phone. While you may not be able to easily find a replacement battery for your cell phone, you can probably find a charger that will charge it off of batteries. One of these back-up devices will provide you with more time on your cell phone, even if you don't have the usual electrical power supply to recharge it.

Fuel

Another item that becomes impossible to find in times of disaster is fuel. A vehicle without fuel is essentially worthless so it's a good idea to keep some in your stockpile. Yet, gasoline does not store well and cannot be kept for a long period of time.

Additives can extend the normal life of fuel and allow fuel to be stored in the can for several months. However, there is another way to store fuel for prolonged periods of time: by rotating your supply. Buy several gas cans. Once a month, take and pour the oldest can of gas into your car's gas tank; then refill the can with fresh gasoline. By doing this, you will always have a supply of fresh fuel.

First Aid Kit & Medicines

Hospitals and other medical services are typically overrun with patients in the aftermath of any crisis. Many of those people are suffering from serious problems that require immediate attention. However, there are always those who are there for minor problems. If you have a good first-aid kit, you can take care of your own family's needs without having to go to the hospital.

If you have anyone in your family who regularly needs medicine, keep a stock of their prescription on hand at all times. These and over-the-counter medicines may not be readily available in an emergency situation.

Repair Materials

It is not uncommon for homes to become damaged in a disaster. Whether you're talking about a hurricane or a fire, damage occurs. Even man-made disasters can cause serious damage to homes due to mob violence.

While it is unrealistic for most people to have a stock of building materials sitting around their home, a lot can be done with a few tarps and some duct tape. Damaged roofs or walls can be temporarily repaired, broken windows can be covered, and temporary shelters can be made with these simple materials.

Personal Hygiene Items

It is hard to maintain personal hygiene in the aftermath of a crisis, especially when there is a limited water supply. Nevertheless, basic hygiene is necessary for maintaining health. Therefore, it is a good idea to keep a stock of all the personal hygiene supplies

that your family uses on hand. In addition, be sure to have a big supply of toilet paper and feminine hygiene products.

One item which many people forget about is anti-bacterial hand cleaner. If you are faced with a shortage of water, this can go a long way towards both saving water and maintaining health. These gel sanitizers can be used without water, yet kill all bacteria and protozoa, preparing your hands for safe food handling.

Weapons

In the aftermath of disasters, people who aren't prepared become desperate. Those desperate people tend to flock together, forming a mob. Mobs often become violent, vandalizing property, stealing belongings and hurting others. Having weapons can prevent you and your family from becoming victims.

Preparing Food for Long-Term Storage

Food has a number of enemies, all of which destroy its value for our use. These enemies include oxygen, light, heat, bacteria, insects and rodents. While the bacteria, insects and rodents want to eat the food for their own purposes, the other items simply destroy its nutritional value.

To store food for long periods of time, special precautions need to be taken to protect the food from all of these enemies. Canning does an excellent job of this, but canning only works for foods that are packed in liquid. However, there is a method for packing foods that can't be kept in liquid for long-term storage. You will need:

- Five-gallon food-grade buckets
- Six-gallon Mylar bags
- A hair straightener or clothes iron
- A vacuum cleaner with a hose
- Oxygen absorbers
- A rubber mallet

The idea is to pack the food in such a way that none of the aforementioned enemies can gain access to it. As long as the food is stored in a cool, dry place, this method works very effectively.

Since we are packing in five-gallon buckets, a sizeable quantity of food needs to be ready and available. Some people pack one type of food per bucket, while others package the ingredients for certain meals together in a bucket. If you buy prepared survival food, it will usually be packed in this second manner. This is very practical, unless you are packaging a large quantity of reserve food stocks to feed a big group of people.

Start by lining the five-gallon buckets with the Mylar bags. If packaging dry foods, they can either be removed from the factory packaging (if the bucket is only going to contain one type of food), or can be left in their individual packages when placed inside the Mylar bags. The bags should be filled to about an inch below the lip of the bucket.

The Mylar will melt readily when heated with a hair straightener or clothes iron. This allows the bag to be sealed airtight. Seal the top of the bag, leaving a two-inch space at the end unsealed.

Place an oxygen absorber in the bag. These come in a variety of sizes so it is important to buy ones that are appropriate for the bucket size and type of foods that you are storing. The manufacturers can guide you as to the right amount of oxygen absorption needed for particular types of food. One precaution on using oxygen absorbers is that they are very fast-acting. The process of putting them in with the food and sealing the bag must be done very quickly. Otherwise, the oxygen absorbers will pull oxygen from the atmosphere and not from the air trapped in the bag.

Stick the end of the vacuum cleaner hose into the bag opening, and suck out as much air as possible. Take the hose out, and quickly close the two-inch gap so that the bag is fully sealed. Leave excess material so that the bag can be cut open and resealed again.

Once the bag is sealed, the flap can be folded over and the bucket lid placed on. Use a rubber mallet to drive the lid on, ensuring that it is fully seated.

Surviving Away from Home

Surviving a disaster away from home is a lot more challenging than surviving one when you are at home. The biggest problem is that you don't have any of your usual equipment or supplies. On top of that, you don't have the house itself, namely the shelter that it provides.

That doesn't mean that you should just give up and die, though! It merely means that you are faced with greater challenges to overcome. The biggest challenge, besides surviving, is to make your way back home. Unless your home has been destroyed or taken over by an angry mob, you're always better off at home than you are anywhere else. So, whatever you do to survive, your decision-making should ultimately be driven by the goal of getting you back home.

Just like preparation makes the job of surviving at home easier, it also makes the job of surviving away from home easier. Having a survival kit with you is the first step towards successfully surviving when you are away from home. In addition to the survival kit, you need to learn some survival skills. Being able to make a shelter in the wild, find water and gather food are essential skills for staying alive outdoors.

The more knowledge you have about how to survive in the wild, the easier it will be to find solutions to every challenge at hand. At the same time, your survival skills will affect your survival kit. A person who doesn't know how to trap small game doesn't need to have materials with them to create a snare. Every item in the survival kit needs to be something that you know how to leverage to your advantage and have practiced using; otherwise, it's a waste of space and weight.

The survival kit also needs to be customized to your specific survival circumstances. More importantly, it needs to be customized to the type of terrain and climate that you are most likely going to deal with. If you might be crossing an area that is very arid, like a desert, you may have to use a solar still to extract water from plants that you encounter. However, you won't need that if you are traveling in an area that has lots of streams and ponds.

Survival Kits Come in All Sizes

There really is no such thing as a standard survival kit. Through the years, I've seen many different survival kits. Each one had what the owner thought they would need to survive, but no two had exactly the same contents. Of course, there were many things in common, but there were also unique items found in one kit that were missing from others.

Even the container used for creating your survival kit can vary extensively. One of the best survival kit containers I've ever seen was an empty coffee can. It provided a waterproof container to hold the supplies and could also be used for cooking or boiling water in. However, even that was an imperfect choice as a coffee can is harder to carry than something that hangs on your belt.

You can literally use anything as a container for making a survival kit. There are two main types: a basic kit and what is often referred to as a 72-hour bag. The basic kit is small and easy to keep with you at all times, while the 72-hour bag is usually a backpack stuffed with goods. The name comes from the fact that they contain three days' worth of food. These larger kits are also known as bug-out bags and get-home bags. Regardless of the name, they perform the same function: giving you what you need to survive for a few days.

Both kits have their place. While having more with you can make your job of surviving much easier and much more comfortable, it isn't always practical to carry a backpack around. That's when you need the smaller survival kit. It's also useful to keep a small survival kit in the trunk of your car just in case you break down in the middle of nowhere.

The Basic Survival Kit

I have built several basic survival kits through the years, each one unique. What I am using now is an 18 cm tall pouch that hangs on my belt and holds enough equipment for me to survive several days in the wild.



Just like the home survival kit, a personal survival kit has to contain everything necessary to provide heating, water, food and shelter. In addition, a portable survival kit needs to contain means of signaling for help, something that isn't needed at home . Granted, there's not much room in a small pouch to carry water and food, but there is enough room to carry the means of purifying water and catching food.

What it takes to survive actually makes for a rather long list of items that need to be contained in such a small package. But making the package any bigger may mean it's impractical to carry around at all times. There is always a trade-off between the size of the kit and the thoroughness of the contents. At a minimum, a personal survival kit should contain the following.

Fire Starters

Since fire is such a basic ingredient for survival, always start with that. Most survival instructors will tell you that you need two primary and two secondary means of starting a fire. A primary means of starting a fire is something that is easy to use, such as matches or a lighter. A secondary means of starting a fire is something that takes more practice and skill; however, with practice it is dependable. While four different means of starting a fire could be excessive, include two at a minimum.

In addition to the means to start the fire, it's also good to have something to act as tinder—preferably something that will work no matter what the weather conditions. The petroleum jelly-soaked cotton balls mentioned earlier are ideal for this. Another good one is dryer lint that has been soaked with paraffin.

Water Purification

Since water can't be carried as part of the kit, a means of purifying water must be. There are many ways of going about this, including straw-type water purifiers, water purification tablets and of course boiling water. Since clean water is such an important part of survival, at least two means of water purification should be carried at all times.

In addition to being able to purify water, you'll need some way of carrying water with you. The coffee can survival kit I mentioned earlier provides a means of doing this if everything else is taken out of the coffee can. Other common containers for carrying water that are found in survival kits are plastic zipper bags and condoms.

Means of Capturing Food

Since a portable survival kit may not have enough room to carry food in it, you should carry some way of capturing food. Other than a hunting rifle or bow, the two best ways of catching food are fishing and using snares to capture small animals.

A survival fishing kit really doesn't need much in it to be effective. A couple of fish hooks, some line, a bobber and some split-shot weights provide enough to catch some fish. While this may not be as good as a full-blown fishing rod and tackle box, it's a lot easier to fit into the survival kit.

Snares can be made out of string, fishing line, rope or wire. Of these, wire is the best as it cuts into the animal's neck, cutting off circulation more effectively than other methods. An excellent wire to carry for a snare is guitar string. These are about the right length, are strong enough, don't kink easily and already have a loop at one end for making the snare.

Means of Constructing Shelter

Shelter in the wild can consist of almost anything that cuts the wind and helps reflect the heat from a fire back to you to provide warmth. The most common shelter is a lean-to made of branches. Another common shelter is a debris shelter: a framework that is just big enough to crawl into, much like a sleeping bag. Debris (sticks and leaves) from the

forest floor are piled on the framework to cover it and provide insulation. A pile of debris can even be put in the opening, creating a kind of door.

While you will want to use what nature provides as much as possible in the construction of shelter, it is helpful to have a few tools to work with and some string or parachute cord (sometimes called 550 cord). This will make it much easier to build your shelter.

Tools

Some basic tools make it much easier to build shelter, snares and traps in the wild. The most important tool is a good knife. In addition to that, a wire saw is very useful, as well as a hatchet, a folding camp shovel and a multi-tool. How many tools you carry will depend upon the size of your survival kit. Remember, though, that tools are metal and therefore heavy. Make sure you only have what you will use. Try and buy tools that will fulfill multiple purposes in order to keep your overall weight and bulk down.

Signaling Devices

If you are stranded, injured or lost in the wild, your best chances for survival are if someone will come looking for you. Always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back. That way, if you don't come back as planned, they can raise the alarm and send out people to look for you. When that happens, you'll need a way to signal them.

The two most common signaling devices used in survival kits are a metal mirror and a whistle. Either one will allow you to attract the attention of people looking for you. Metal mirrors can be used effectively to reflect sunlight for miles, even far enough to signal your position to a pilot in an aircraft.



The contents of the author's survival kit:

1. Two pieces of heavy-duty aluminum foil, 30 cm square, to be used for cooking
2. First-aid kit
3. Micro Maglite flashlight
4. Steel mirror
5. Two pieces of paper, folded around the mirror to protect it from scratching
Plastic bag to use as a canteen (one of two) and to store items 4 & 5
6. Gerber Grylls Survival Multi-tool
7. Gerber folding knife
8. Aquamira Frontier Emergency Water Filter Straw
9. Water purification tablets
10. Waterproof match holder with built-in whistle and compass, filled with storm-proof matches
11. Wire saw (3-wire type)
12. Emergency rescue blanket

13. Sewing kit, consisting of 3 meters of button thread, two buttons and two safety pins (thread doubles as fishing line)
14. Mechanical pencil with one meter of duct tape wrapped around it
15. Spare battery for flashlight
16. Magnesium fire starter
17. One-quart plastic bag to use as a canteen (two of two)
18. Eight meters of parachute cord, spooled
19. Sewing needle for sewing kit
20. Four cotton balls soaked in petroleum jelly as fire starters, packaged wrapped with hair band
21. Fishing bobber with two fishing hooks stuck into it
22. Split weights for fishing
23. Guitar string for use as a snare



The first-aid kit in the survival kit contains:

- A. 5 cm by 7 cm sterile pad
- B. Two fabric knuckle bandages
- C. Neosporin, an antiseptic ointment
- D. Two alcohol towelettes
- E. Two standard Band-Aids®
- F. Ibuprofen
- G. A very effective medicine for diarrhea

H. Antihistamine

If needed, the duct tape in the survival kit can serve as medical tape. If larger dressings are needed, they would need to be cut from the individual's clothing. Moss also makes an excellent bandage if a larger bandage is needed and nothing else is available.

What to Add to Pad Your Survival Kit

The survival kit just described is what I would call a bare bones survival kit. It is what I take with me wherever I go just to have something to fall back on. If I am going hiking in the woods, I take it along as well. But if I was to be caught in an emergency situation, I'd much rather have a larger kit.

The problem with a larger kit is that it can be very hard to carry it around with you, hence the need for the bare bones kit. Nevertheless, having a large kit as well, for the times when it is possible to bring it along, is an excellent idea. In that case, there is enough space to carry a number of extra items along, making it much easier to survive and travel through the wild. How much of what you can carry along will depend a lot on how big of a survival kit you build.

Assuming that a backpack is used, such as for the 72-hour bag, there's a lot of room to add extra survival equipment. Even more important than that, there is room to carry food and at least some water. A 72-hour bag will usually contain three days' worth of food, either dehydrated or vacuum-packed.

All food that goes into the 72-hour bag should be high in carbohydrates, fats and protein. Don't worry so much about the micro-nutrients, such as vitamins, as this is merely for short-term survival. It must be lightweight and compact so that there is enough room in the bag for everything.

In addition to food, consider adding:

- A sleeping bag – Makes for warmer nights and greater comfort; can also prevent hypothermia

- Camping cookware – Lightweight backpacking cookware and eating utensils, made out of aluminum or titanium, are much better than cooking with a stick or piece of foil.
- Canteen with cup – This provides a much better method of carrying water with you. Some tactical backpacks are designed for a water bladder, which works well also.
- Clothing – Clothing is bulky so you don't want to take much of it. Nevertheless, a change of clothing will do a lot to help you maintain your personal hygiene.
- Gloves– Many people hurt their hands when traveling through the wild because they aren't toughened enough to handle rocks, thorns and other things they encounter.
- A hat – Keep your head warm and protect it from the sun
- A larger first-aid kit – The biggest thing to add to a first-aid kit is larger dressings to care for larger wounds. Additional medicines can also be useful.
- Folding camp shovel – For building fires, digging latrines and creating more comfortable sleeping spots.
- Hatchet – Very useful for cutting firewood and making shelters in the wild.
- Honing stone – Any knife that is used a lot will become dull.
- Knife – Only a folding knife is in the basic survival kit, but a straight sheath knife is much better.
- Maps – Assuming you are trying to get to somewhere, it helps to have a map to show you the way. These will need to be changed and updated to match the places you go.
- Rain poncho – There's nothing more miserable than being wet and not having a way to get out of the rain. A rain poncho will help protect you and keep you warm, and in a pinch it can be used as either a tent or to carry things.
- Toilet paper and toiletries – Personal hygiene is important to prevent sickness. Pack tissues, a toothbrush, floss (doubles as string), deodorant, etc.
- Tent – If you can find a nice, lightweight backpacking tent, it will save you the considerable time and stress of making shelters out of what nature provides.

- Larger tactical flashlight – The small flashlight in the small survival kit isn't very powerful; a larger one is very useful.
- Weapons – Depending upon your situation, weapons can be needed for hunting or for personal defense.

Always remember that anything you put in your survival kit, whether the small kit or the large one, is something that you have to carry. You don't want any more weight than necessary. Therefore, seek out lightweight items. If there are two items to pick from to accomplish the same thing, you're probably going to be better off with the lighter one, unless the heavier one provides enough additional capability to justify the weight.

Speaking of capability, items that provide multiple uses are wonderful. A hatchet that can be used as a hammer is much more useful than one that is designed for throwing. Ultimately, you're more likely to need a hammer to drive tent stakes than you are to need a hatchet to kill an enemy by throwing it at them.

Conclusion

Survival, whether at home or on the road, depends mostly upon preparation. Those who are properly prepared for a disaster are much more likely to survive it. It doesn't matter if we're talking about a natural disaster or a man-made one; the need for preparation is the same.

There are three types of preparation that are needed in order to be ready to deal with a disaster: attitude, knowledge and stockpiling.

Anyone's ability to survive is going to be greatly increased if they have the right attitude—the attitude of a fighter, a survivor, a winner. Those people are also the ones who are going to do whatever is necessary to get themselves ready for a disaster, by learning the necessary skills and stockpiling the necessary equipment and supplies.

While it is possible to survive without the right items, it is much easier to survive when they're on hand. Each of the essentials for survival that is missing from one's survival kit costs extra time and energy in creating or finding the items to meet those needs. Considering that surviving alone is a very time-consuming and energy-draining challenge, anything that can be done to make it easier is worth the effort.

You never know when a disaster will strike or where you will be when it happens. Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared at all times. That means having a disaster survival kit at home and a portable one that you can take with you. In that way, you'll always have something to work with should a disaster strike.

Building the best survival kit isn't something that you can do in one day. It takes time to develop the necessary skills and find the necessary equipment and supplies to make it possible to survive even the greatest catastrophe. People who are serious about survival are constantly improving both their skills and their kits.

Nevertheless, every journey must start with a single step. Nobody ever became ready to survive a disaster and its aftermath without getting started. Perhaps you can't do everything now that you need, but you can take the first step and build a bare bones kit.

That step will make you a little bit more ready to survive any disaster that comes along. By continuing to take one step after another, you will soon find yourself ready for anything that life can throw at you.

Don't wait. Begin to make your preparations today because none of us know how close the next disaster is to striking.

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