

Gear maintenance & Care

Keep Your Camping Gear Working (and Lasting) for Years

You just spent money on camping gear. Now let's make sure it lasts.

Most gear problems occur due to poor maintenance, not poor quality. A little care after each trip can add years to the life of your equipment and save you from expensive replacements.

Below, we will cover the basics: how to clean, store, and maintain your core camping gear so it's always ready whenever you are.

Jump to a Section

[Tent Care](#)

[Sleeping Bag Care](#)

[Sleeping Pad Care](#)

[Camp Stove Maintenance](#)

[Cooler Care](#)

[Cookware & Utensils](#)

[Rain Gear & Clothing](#)

[Headlamps & Lights](#)

[Backpacs & Gear Bags](#)

[Common Gear Maintenance Mistakes](#)

[Gear Maintenance Checklist](#)

TENT CARE

Your tent is one of your biggest investments. Take care of it, and it'll take care of you.

After Every Trip

1. Shake Out Debris

- Turn your tent inside out and shake out dirt, leaves, and pine needles
- Brush off the tent stakes and poles

2. Spot Clean Stains

- Use a damp sponge or cloth with lukewarm water
- For stubborn spots, use mild soap (not detergent)
- Avoid harsh chemicals that can damage waterproof coatings

3. Dry Completely Before Storing

- Set up your tent at home if you packed it wet
- Let it air out for at least a few hours, preferably overnight
- Moisture = mildew = ruined tent

Deep Cleaning (Once or Twice a Season)

- Fill a tub with cool water and mild soap
- Gently hand-wash the tent body and rainfly
- Rinse thoroughly to remove all soap
- Hang to dry completely in shade (not direct sunlight)

Never put your tent in a washing machine or dryer. The agitator and heat can damage fabric and coatings.

Storage

The #1 Tent Storage Mistake: Keeping it compressed in its stuff sack.

The Right Way:

- Store your tent loosely in a large breathable bag (a mesh laundry bag works great)
- Or hang it in a closet
- Keep it in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight

Why? Long-term compression breaks down fabric and coatings. Loose storage extends tent life.

Maintaining Waterproofing

Over time, the waterproof coating on your tent wears down. Here's how to restore it:

- Check for water beading: spray your tent with water. If it soaks in instead of beading up, it's time to re-waterproof.
- Use a tent-specific waterproofing spray (like Nikwax or Gear Aid)
- Apply to the rainfly and the tent floor, following product instructions
- Let dry completely before storing

Repairing Small Tears

- Use tent repair tape for small holes or tears
- Apply to both sides of the fabric for a strong hold
- Keep a patch kit in your gear bin for quick fixes on trips

SLEEPING BAG CARE

Your sleeping bag keeps you warm. Don't ruin it with bad storage.

After Every Trip

1. Air It Out

- Unzip your sleeping bag completely
- Hang it or lay it flat for 24 hours
- This releases moisture and odors

2. Spot Clean if Needed

- Use a damp cloth with mild soap on dirty spots
- Focus on the hood and collar, where oils from skin and hair accumulate

Washing Your Sleeping Bag

How Often: Only when actually dirty (not after every trip). Washing too often wears down insulation.

How to Wash:

- Use a front-loading washing machine (top loaders can damage baffles)
- Use a gentle cycle with cool or warm water
- Use a sleeping bag-specific detergent (regular detergent damages insulation)
- Run an extra rinse cycle to remove all soap

Drying:

- Use the lowest heat setting in a large dryer
- Add 2 to 3 clean tennis balls to break up clumps and restore loft
- Check every 30 minutes and fluff by hand

- Continue until completely dry (can take 2 to 3 hours)
- Let it air out overnight before storing

Never dry-clean a sleeping bag unless the manufacturer specifically says to.

Storage

The #1 Sleeping Bag Storage Mistake: Keeping it compressed in its stuff sack.

The Right Way:

- Hang it in a closet
- Or store it loosely in a large breathable bag
- Never store compressed

Why? Compression kills loft (the fluffy insulation that keeps you warm). Loose storage maintains warmth for years.

SLEEPING PAD CARE

After Every Trip

- Wipe down with a damp cloth to remove dirt
- Let it air out before rolling or folding

Storage

- Foam pads: roll or lay flat, doesn't matter
- Inflatable pads: store partially inflated (not fully inflated, not completely deflated)
- Check for leaks periodically and patch immediately

Repairing Leaks

- Most pads come with a patch kit
 - Clean and dry the area around the leak
 - Apply the patch according to the kit instructions
 - Let it cure for 24 hours before using
-

CAMP STOVE MAINTENANCE

A well-maintained stove is a reliable stove.

After Every Trip

- Wipe down surfaces to remove grease and food residue
- Check fuel connections for leaks (smell for gas)
- Clean burner holes with a small wire or needle if clogged

Storage

- Store with fuel disconnected
 - Keep in a dry place
 - Check O-rings and gaskets periodically for wear
-

COOLER CARE

A clean cooler doesn't smell. A dirty cooler... does.

After Every Trip

- Empty all contents and ice
- Wash with warm water and baking soda (or mild soap)
- Scrub corners and crevices where mold grows
- Rinse thoroughly and dry completely
- Leave the lid cracked open during storage to prevent mildew

Pro Tip: Wipe down your cooler with white vinegar to eliminate stubborn odors.

COOKWARE & UTENSILS

After Every Trip

- Wash all cookware with soap and water
- Dry completely before storing
- Store nested to save space

Cast Iron Care (If You Use It)

- Wash with hot water (no soap)
 - Dry immediately
 - Apply a thin layer of cooking oil before storing
-

RAIN GEAR & CLOTHING

After Every Trip

- Hang wet rain gear to dry completely
- Spot clean with a damp cloth if dirty

Washing

- Turn inside out
- Use a gentle cycle with cool water
- Use technical fabric detergent (like Nikwax Tech Wash)
- Tumble dry on low heat to reactivate DWR (water repellent coating)

Restoring Water Repellency

If water stops beading up on your rain jacket:

- Wash it first (dirt reduces water repellency)
 - Apply DWR spray or wash in treatment (like Nikwax TX Direct)
 - Tumble dry on low to activate
-

HEADLAMPS & LIGHTS

After Every Trip

- Remove batteries if storing for more than a month (prevents corrosion)
- Wipe down with a dry cloth
- Check for water damage if used in the rain

Storage

- Keep extra batteries in your gear bin
 - Test lights before each trip
-

BACKPACKS & GEAR BAGS

After Every Trip

- Shake out crumbs and dirt
- Vacuum pockets and compartments
- Spot clean stains with mild soap and water
- Let dry completely before storing

Deep Cleaning

- Hand wash in a tub with mild soap
 - Or use a front-loading washing machine on a gentle cycle
 - Air dry (never put in dryer)
-

COMMON GEAR MAINTENANCE MISTAKES

Mistake 1: Storing Gear Dirty

- Dirt and moisture cause mildew, odors, and damage
- Always clean and dry gear before storing

Mistake 2: Keeping Tents and Sleeping Bags Compressed

- Long-term compression ruins fabric, coatings, and insulation
- Store loosely

Mistake 3: Using Harsh Chemicals

- Household cleaners damage technical fabrics and coatings
- Use gear-specific products or mild soap

Mistake 4: Storing Gear in Hot or Humid Places

- Garages and attics have extreme temperatures
- Store in a cool, dry place

Mistake 5: Ignoring Small Problems

- A small tear becomes a big tear
- A dirty stove burner stops working
- Fix issues immediately

GEAR MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

After Every Trip:

- Shake out and spot clean the tent
- Air out the sleeping bag
- Wipe down the sleeping pad
- Clean the cooler and dry it completely
- Wash cookware
- Check the stove for clogs or leaks
- Hang rain gear to dry

Before Storing:

- Dry all gear completely
- Store the tent and sleeping bag loosely
- Remove batteries from lights
- Leave the cooler lid cracked open

Once a Season:

- Deep clean tent
- Wash sleeping bag (if needed)
- Check the tent waterproofing
- Inspect all gear for damage
- Restock the first aid kit

Good gear isn't cheap. But with a little care, it'll last for years.

The 20 minutes you spend cleaning and storing your gear after a trip will save you hundreds of dollars in replacements and repairs down the road.

Take care of your gear, and it'll take care of you.
