

# Outdoor Living



# Get Out There! (Safely)

As temperatures rise, the call of the great outdoors intensifies.

The good news is that even city dwellers are typically close to walking or bike trails. Campgrounds and waterways provide their own gorgeous settings a little further out. You might scale a mountain, or ski along a lake's smooth surface. But whatever you do, keep your safety and civic responsibility top of mind.

## KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Go at your own pace and set realistic goals for any activity you're taking part in. Find trails that match your ability when hiking or snow skiing. Local and national parks will often feature long, flat trails that are perfect for both beginners and the more experienced. Where you fit on that scale determines whether you strike out deep into the Grand Canyon's famous descents, or hang out on the rim trail that provides an easier path.

## BE PREPARED

Finding just the right spot is easier than ever with today's online resources. Start at [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov), a great resource for those looking to discover outdoors spaces. The site offers a range of detailed information on activities including camping, wildlife viewing, park and monument tours, ranger-led activities and more. Next, you'll need to gear up. Make sure you have enough food and water.



© ADOBE STOCK

Don't forget emergency items, a flashlight and a poncho. If you're unsure what you might need for a new experience, talk to folks at your local clubs or sporting-goods stores.

## BE SAFE

Check weather forecasts both before and throughout your adventure. Mountaintops

can grow quite cold at night, even in summer. Rainstorms make boating, and sometimes even camping, a precarious activity. Flash floods and lightning strikes are particularly dangerous. Stay on the trail, or within the prescribed skiing and boating lanes. These control structures are there for a reason: To keep you safe.

Uneven terrain and animal habitats can pose their own kind of hazards. Leave any wildlife you find to themselves, and don't feed them.

## DON'T POLLUTE

Gorgeous trails and pristine waterways have been marred everywhere by plastic bottles and candy wrappers. Once

you're out there, take advantage of any available garbage receptacles. Otherwise, pack out your trash — including food waste — from any camp site, hiking trail or boat. This material can pose a serious danger to animals, the health of the natural world, and other boaters when you're on the water.

# Campfire Safety Tips

Camping often revolves around the fire. They warm us, spark conversation and help complete the very best s'mores. But they pose dangers too.

## WILDFIRE RISK

Many wildfires are ignited by a bolt of lightning, but we actually cause an overwhelming share of them. In fact, human-sparked fires accounted for 88% of all wildfires between 2016-20, according to government statistics. Almost 59,000 wildfires torched more than 10 million acres of land in the U.S. in 2020 alone — the second-most total acreage ever, after 1960. Typically, these incidents start as a careless or accidental act. So, it's important that we all do our part not to become unwitting contributors to this growing problem.

## PICKING YOUR SPOT

Where you build your campfire is critical for safety. Use existing pits or fire circles, if they are provided. Check with local authorities about restrictions; some places have restrictions in place on flammable things like campfires and even barbecues. Don't start a fire in windy or very dry conditions, and build them at least 15 feet away from flammable materials like shrubbery or tents. The ideal spot is downwind from your tents and



© ADOBE STOCK

camping gear. Make sure there aren't any branches or limbs directly above the fire.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Bring along something to light your fire with, and then start collecting nearby wood sources. There are three levels to any camp fire. The base is made of fuel wood, large pieces

that will provide sustained flames and heat once the fire is underway. Smaller branches that are less than one inch in diameter makes up kindling, which helps spread the flames to the larger pieces of wood. Finally, get the fire started with some tinder, which consists of easy-burning dry leaves, small twigs and grass.

Avoid breaking branches of trees, saws or hatchets, since downed and dead wood burns more easily. It's also easier to collect for the fire, and has less environmental impact.

## EXTINGUISHING SAFELY

The most important part of campfire safety can be what you do once it's time to extin-

guish the flames. If possible, simply let the fire burn to ash. If you are going to bed or leaving the site before then, pour water all over the fire to drown out all embers. Stir everything in your fire pit with a shovel, testing for remaining heat sources. Cover with dirt or sand. Never leave a fire unattended.

# Powering Yourself on the Water

Nothing will get you closer to nature than a personally powered watercraft. So, let's get paddling!

## WHY IT'S SO FUN

When you take on some rapids in a kayak, or cut a path across a lake in your canoe, you're just inches away from the beauty and power that surrounds you. At the same time, you're living a healthier lifestyle by getting exercise that engine-powered vessels simply can't provide. Finally, canoes, kayaks and other personal crafts are less expensive to own and maintain, less expensive to rent, and can bring you this one-of-a-kind experience in waterways, lakes and ponds that are both large and small. Just be aware of the inherent dangers of these self-contained adventures: Always wear a life jacket, and study ahead to learn more about water depths, wind advisories and forecasts of bad weather.

## RECREATIONAL KAYAKS

Smaller, lighter and easier to maneuver than larger boats, recreational kayaks are uniquely suited for beginners and people who take shorter trips in calmer, backwater locales. They may hold either one or two passengers, depending on the design, and are usually 10 to 12 feet long. That length provides stability without making transport too difficult. You won't have room



© ADOBE STOCK

for supplies, however, so they're not ideal for longer trips. Inflatable kayaks, or sit-on-top versions, are wider and thus a bit more stable.

## CANOES

These watercraft come in a very wide range of sizes, from solo whitewater editions that

run less than 10-feet long to bulkier four-person canoes that stretch out to an eye-popping 23 feet. This larger version allows for a lot more gear, but obviously aren't as easy to transport and maneuver.

Canoes typically run about 33 to 40 inches across; the wider editions provide more stability,

but are more difficult to paddle. Consider renting a canoe before you decide to purchase one, so you can test out which type best suits your needs and wants.

## SEA KAYAKS

Sea kayaks, unlike their recreational cousins, are longer

and boast lifted hulls, making them better at handling rough water.

They're a bit quicker, roomier inside, and range from 12 to 16 feet. Many also have a rudder and/or skeg. The skeg helps keep your kayak on course, while the rudder provides more maneuverability.

# More than Simply Pests

Ticks and mosquitos have always been an annoyance. Increasingly, however, they're more than simply pests: They present a possible health hazard.

## THE RISKS

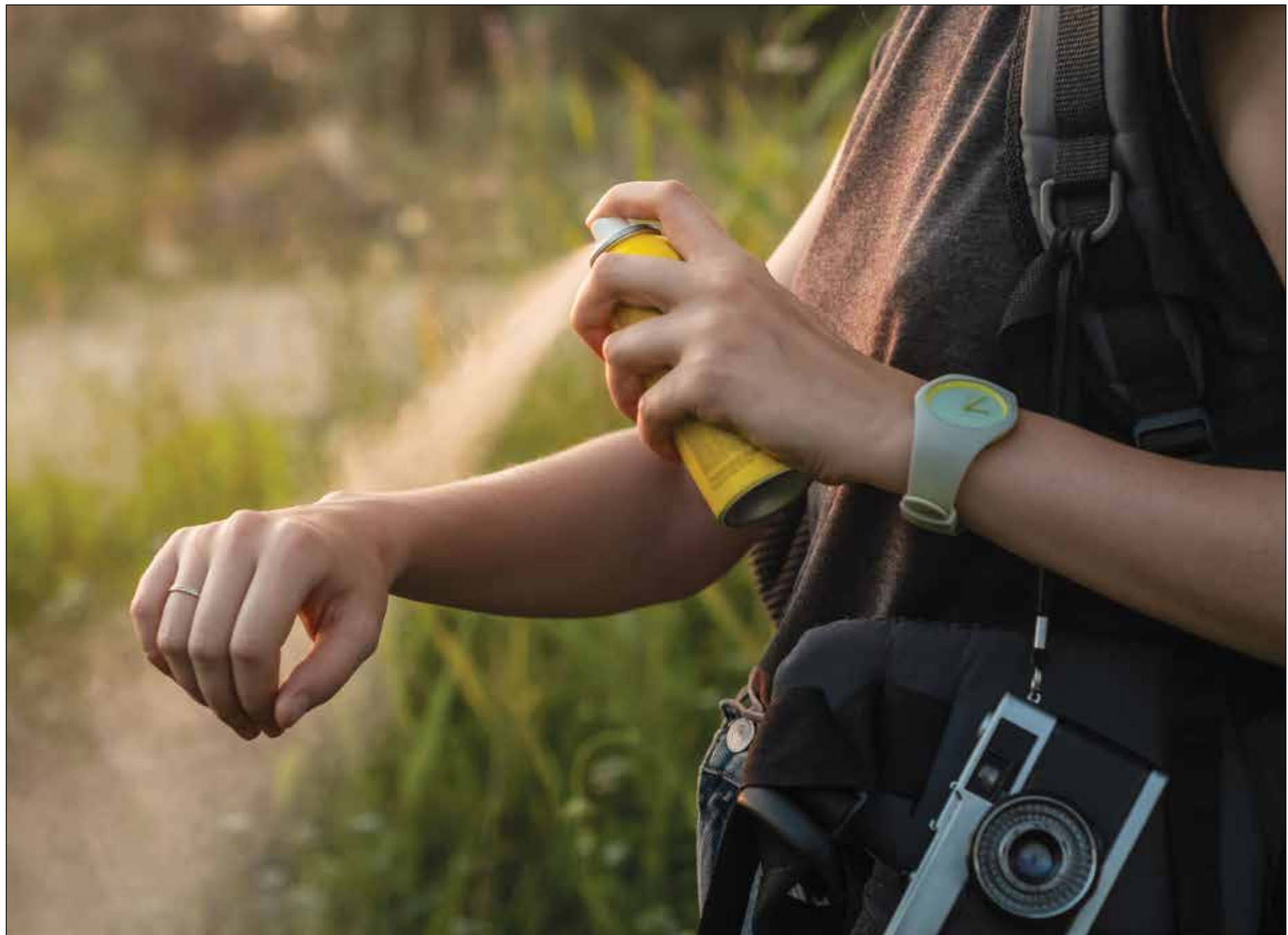
Take proper precautions when spending time outdoors to ensure you are protected. Mosquito and tick bites can lead to immune-system compromising infections. They've been directly linked to West Nile virus, yellow fever, zika and Lyme disease. The good news is, we have tools to help protect ourselves from these dangers.

## WHAT THEY CARRY

West Nile causes seizures, high fever and neurological problems. This virus is fatal for about 10% of the people who contract it. Lyme disease can cause serious headaches, nerve damage and an irregular heartbeat, while also impacting short-term memory. The aedes mosquito carries the Zika virus, which can lead to serious birth defects and has also been linked to the nervous-system attacking Guillain-Barre syndrome.

## HOW TO AVOID THEM

It is, of course, basically impossible to completely



© ADOBE STOCK

eliminate the chances of getting bitten by a bug when you're outdoors. Still, you can reduce your chances by wearing light, loose clothing. Ticks and mosquitoes tend to be attracted to darker colors. Stick to the trail, since both of these pests tend to congregate in underbrush. To avoid ticks, don't sit directly on the ground. Stay away from logs

too, if possible. Unlike mosquitoes, ticks can't fly; you've got to come in direct contact with them. If all else fails, make sure your first-aid kit is fully stocked — including some anti-itch medication.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF

Sprays and lotions containing DEET are recommended for protection against mosqui-

toes. It works as a disguise, covering up our natural scent so that it's harder to be identified as a possible host. Developed in 1946 by the U.S. Army, DEET has been available to the public since the late 1950s.

The Environmental Protection Agency reports it's effective at repelling mosquitoes for up to 12 hours.

Reapply as insects return. Shower within two hours of coming in from the outdoors in order to reduce your risk of Lyme disease or other tick borne maladies. Examine your body, pets and gear. Ticks tend to attach under the arms, on the back of your knee, around the ears, in your hair, inside your belly button, and around your waist.



© ADOBE STOCK

# Gearing Up for the Elements

Spend any measurable time outdoors, and you're going to get dirty, hot, wet or cold. Being in the elements is part and parcel of the experience. But all-weather gear can lessen these impacts.

## HOW THEY WORK

All-weather gear protects hikers, campers and other outdoorsy types from nature's harsher conditions, while also offering ventilation so that

their skin can breathe. The best versions of these items still provide a full range of motion for all of whatever almost any activity. Beyond jackets, shirts and pants, this gear can also improve your nighttime experience with greatly improved versions of the traditional sleeping bag. Accessories like a hydration vest will include a handy pouch for water, as well as places to put your phone, flashlight, keys or a small first-aid kit.

## MODERN MATERIALS

New technology has made your old wardrobe completely obsolete, as today's tech supersedes even the all-weather gear from a couple of

decades ago. Except among fishermen, polyvinyl chloride or plastic material has largely given way to polyester- or nylon-based fabrics with an assortment of very effective weatherproof coatings. So-called breathable fabrics help fight off the sense of being clammy and cold — and hot and sticky, too. They do this by transferring moisture away from your body, rather than trapping it inside. Water vapor can pass out, but rain is also kept at bay. That leads to increased comfort no matter which season or climate you find yourself adventuring in. So why do fishers still like polyvinyl chloride material? It's slick, and easy to clean. These items are also stain resistant, and relatively more cost effi-

cient. Look for heat-welded seams for complete protection from rain.

## INSIDE THE TERMINOLOGY

Brush up on the most common terms before shopping for all-weather gear: Waterproof items are rated sufficient to stop driving rain. Water resistant gear is breathable, and but can only withstand brief periods of light rain. All waterproof jackets are also rated as "windproof," while wind-resistant gear is typically ultralight and designed for short trips. Three-in-one jackets combine a rain jacket with an insulated shell or fleece that zips in. Shells can be a part of parkas, pants or ponchos, and may be hard, soft, insulated or hybrid in design.

# Don't Forget Furry Friends

Dogs make terrific companions for any outdoor adventure. Here's how to have a fun — and safe — time with your furry friend.

## GETTING READY TO GO

First, make sure you have enough food and water for your dog, too. It can sometimes be difficult to find pet-focused items when away from home. Bringing your dog along also requires some advance research, since some parks, beaches and campgrounds place restrictions on pets. They may only be allowed in certain areas or trails, and a leash may or may not be required. Bring extra bags so that you can clean up after your dog, too. If you have an older pet, make sure that the terrain, climate and slope of your destination don't present too much of a challenge.

## ADVENTURE IDEAS

Dogs love to walk, so hiking trails are a match made in heaven. Camping with your pet can also be great fun, but you may want to test out the experience first: Set up a tent in your backyard and see how your dog likes it. Once you get out there, be prepared for lots of side trips to explore new sights and smells. But be on the look out for predators, and regularly check for ticks, fleas and other parasites. If you take your dog on a boat, be sure to bring a



© ADOBE STOCK

pet-designed life jacket. Currents and other underwater dangers present a risk of drowning.

## TIPS FOR THE BEST TRIPS

Visit a veterinarian before scheduling any big trip, so they

can evaluate your dog's ability to take part in these increased physical activities. A thorough exam will confirm their good health, while eliminating worries about underlying issues that might keep your dog from enjoying all the outdoor fun. Then head to the web. Sites like

GoPetFriendly.com have road-trip planning guides with details on dog-friendly activities, hotels and potty breaks along the way. BringFido.com focuses on dog-friendly campsites. Make sure their collar has all of the proper identification before you leave, just in case.

Remember that accidents can happen on these new adventures. Pack a doggy first-aid kit for minor injuries, as well. It's also helpful to study up on which plants are potentially harmful to dogs, since you'll be interacting with greenery that wouldn't exist in the backyard.

# Enjoy Nature Responsibly

“Leave no trace” has become a mantra for outdoorsy types. It’s actually part of a larger concept meant to help us all enjoy nature responsibly.

## WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Nature can be as beautiful as it is fragile, in particular in popular areas that see so many visitors each year. That’s why the Wilderness Society recommends that we “pack it in and pack it out,” meaning remove everything that you brought into the wild. Even the noise we make can be a kind of pollution in backcountry settings. The more we can reduce our larger footprint, the longer everyone will be able to enjoy the natural world. Unfortunately, others won’t necessarily follow these guidelines. So, carry an extra plastic bag to fill up on the way back to your local trail head.

## CAMPING TIPS

Stay within the designated camping area, so you don’t additionally disrupt the area around you. When washing, use biodegradable soap and take water at least 200 feet away from lakes and streams. Afterward, scatter the used water away from the original source. If possible, set up camp where others have been before, in order to avoid



© ADOBE STOCK

unnecessarily trampling vegetation. Use established fire circles, and keep them as small as possible. Avoid digging trenches or any kind of structure. Don’t feed wild animals; seeing humans as a source of food can put both of you at risk. Campers are recommended to stay 25 yards from most wild mammals in

Yellowstone National Park, for instance, and 100 yards from bears and wolves. Store all food and trash properly, and make sure your fire is completely extinguished.

## HIKING TIPS

Stick to well-defined pathways to avoid disturbing your natural surroundings. Parks

create and maintain these walkways for a reason: Hiking in a single file avoids widening the trail, which can invade animal habitats or crush wildflowers or other fragile flora. Cuts in the trail may also lead to increased runoff and erosion. Start with clean clothes, and a clean backpack. Unintentionally bringing in

non-native seeds or dirt can introduce invasive species that may significantly damage the ecosystem where you’re hiking. For the same reason, you shouldn’t bring any plants, other than fruits and vegetables that you may eat along the way. Inspect your clothing for weeds or seeds before leaving.