

# TechTalk



Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time

## Wilderness Survival Gadgets

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### Introduction

If you enjoy getting away from the bustle of everyday life by hiking or camping, you may want to pack a few select gadgets so that you're prepared in event that you become stranded or lost. Of course, gadgets can't replace professional survival instruction, but they may be able to help get you out of a tough spot when you're at the mercy of the elements.

### What kinds of survival gadgets are available?

- Consider a **device to summon help** in an emergency. It's tempting to rely on a standard cellular phone, but remote areas often have poor wireless coverage. The *SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger* (\$169 retail cost plus annual fees) can notify friends, family or a rescue team of your precise location when you're in trouble. The SPOT device also allows you to electronically check in so that your loved ones know that all is going according to plan. SPOT uses satellites, not mobile phone technology, giving it exceptionally broad coverage. To learn more visit [www.findmespot.com](http://www.findmespot.com).

A **signal mirror** can attract the attention of a passing aircraft. One popular model, the Rescue Flash signal mirror by Adventure Medical Kits (about \$10), has a simple, but effective reflective aiming mechanism.



Notify rescuers of your exact position with a satellite communication gadget by SPOT.



A signal mirror can summon help from passing airplanes when the sun is out.

- **Discovering where you are** is critical if you're lost or disoriented in the woods. Your safest bet is to gain *orienteering* skills ([www.us.orienteering.org](http://www.us.orienteering.org)), which will enable you to use a compass and topographical map to determine your position and hike to safety. You might also consider a *GPS* designed for hiking. Handheld models from Garmin and Magellan start at around \$150. Don't forget a spare set of batteries.



Orienteering skills can allow you to navigate to safety.

- **Technical clothing** refers to garments which wick moisture away from your skin to the outermost layer, where it evaporates in the air. By dressing with appropriate layers of technical clothing, you can avoid hypothermia, a life-threatening condition. Technical garments are made from natural or man-made materials. Cotton is a poor choice, as it loses its insulating value when wet and takes a long time to dry. For similar reasons, you might avoid down as an insulating material in cool weather, as it won't keep you warm if it becomes saturated with water. Instead, buy a jacket with *synthetic insulation* (Primaloft® is a popular choice), which will keep you warm even when wet.



Disposable ponchos keep you dry and can waterproof an improvised shelter.

Ward off unexpected downpours with a *disposable rain poncho* (\$5-\$10). It may be a low-tech solution, but staying dry is essential to your health. If you're in an area like the Pacific Northwest where rain showers are regular and predictable, you might want to pack a *breathable waterproof jacket* made from GORE-TEX® or similar material.

- **Creating shelter** can be critical if the weather is uncooperative. *Disposable ponchos* double as water- and wind-resistance layers for makeshift shelters. A shiny metallic *space blanket*

can help to retain body heat (less than \$20). They are easily packable—folding down to the size of a paperback novel.

- **Gadgets to purify water** remove dangerous pathogens from unknown water sources. Some *filtration systems* (\$20 and up) look like typical squeeze sports water bottles, while others use a pump for higher volume.
- **If you need to make a fire** to stay warm, there are several gadget choices; it's a good idea to keep a couple of different options with you in case one fails. **Waterproof matches** (less than \$5) are a common approach. You can even make your own ([www.wikihow.com/Make-Waterproof-Matches](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Waterproof-Matches)).

A keychain-mounted *fire steel* generates hot sparks that ignite tinder (small pieces of flammable fibrous material like dried bark and leaves.) For one-handed operation, the **BlastMatch** by Ultimate Survival ([ultimatesurvival.com](http://ultimatesurvival.com)) is an easy-to-use choice.

For a little extra peace of mind, you can purchase bits of *emergency tinder* (Tinder-Quick is one brand name) to include in your pack so you won't have to scavenge for it.

- **A pocket multi-tool or multi-function pocket knife** (e.g., a Swiss Army Knife) with a blade, scissors, saw, pliers and other compact tools can be invaluable when creating a shelter or building a fire.
- It's always wise to have some **duct tape** on hand. There's an old saying—if you can't fix it with duct tape, you're just not using enough. Rather than packing a whole roll, simply wrap a few feet around one of your other emergency items (such as a canister of waterproof matches).



A Katadyn brand water filter. ([katadyn.com](http://katadyn.com))



A small fire steel can help you start a fire.



This multi-tool by Leatherman ([leatherman.com](http://leatherman.com)) has several tools which can be useful in the woods.

## Survival Guides at the Library

- **616.0252 BOR**  
*Emergency Survival Guide : You Can Survive Anything* by Michael Borofka
- **613.69 WIS**  
*SAS Survival Handbook : How to Survive in the Wild, in Any Climate, on Land or at Sea* by John Wiseman
- **TRAVEL 910.2 LAN**  
*The Rough Guide to Travel Survival* by Doug Lansky

## Internet Resources

- **Wildwood Survival** ([www.wildwoodsurvival.com/survival/](http://www.wildwoodsurvival.com/survival/)) is a great resource to learn about survival skills and related gadgets.
- **Wilderness Survival** ([www.wilderness-survival.net](http://www.wilderness-survival.net)) is another good source of information. They show the content listing of military survival kits which can help you pack ([www.wilderness-survival.net/Appa.php](http://www.wilderness-survival.net/Appa.php).)

## Where to buy?

- **REI** ([rei.com](http://rei.com)), an outdoor equipment retailer, carries many survival gadgets. There are four Chicago-area stores.
- **Bass Pro Shops** ([basspro.com](http://basspro.com) and two area locations) and **Cabela's** ([cabelas.com](http://cabelas.com) and one area location) cater to outdoor sports enthusiasts and carry a wide range of survival equipment.
- **Military surplus** retailers and **large sporting goods stores** often stock a few survival items.

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