



From purchasing, preparing, and pitching your first tent, to packing, storing, and general maintenance – in this blog, I peg out the groundwork and detail the fundamentals of setting up a camp space for the first-time tourers, beginner go-getters, and learners of alfresco living!

Today's tent designs are diverse and innovative, and knowing what to look for in a tent can be overwhelming. That said, there are still some golden rules you can follow when it comes to tent selection and preparation, both in the shop and before you hit the track.



There are still some golden rules you can follow when it comes to tent selection and preparation. Image: Coleman

Tent Size:

When purchasing your tent, be aware that the stated capacity (i.e. 2-person, 4-person, 8-person, etc.) is generally based on the absolute maximum capacity.

- This won't include space for storing a rucksack, cooking and eating space, or room for getting changed or packing up.
- A 2-person tent will sleep 2 people – no more.
- If you need room to throw your rucksack or swing the proverbial cat, make sure you select a tent that is at least ½ to 1 person larger than the intended sleeping party.

Tent Rating:

Many tents are rated in a 2-, 3-, or 4-season fashion. This is a guide to understanding the suitability of the tent to weather conditions.

- A 2-season tent will generally be suited to warmer, dryer seasons like summer and late spring/early autumn. They'll feature adequate ventilation, a lightweight design, and have only some protection against rain and wind.
- A 3-season tent will be a little more rugged and perhaps feature a combination of ventilation and weather resistance. A decent 3-season tent should repel rain and hold up in a stiff wind.
- A 4-season tent should be able to handle alpine or snow conditions. Its base will be more solid and its design will be stout and stable. Superior rain and snow resistance should feature. It will often be heavier too, as a result of the weather-proof materials.
- For more information, check out the blog on [Understanding Tent Types and Ratings](#).



A decent 3-season tent should repel rain and hold up in a stiff wind. Image: Coleman

Tent Weight:

On the subject of weight, we know that tents are becoming lighter as fabric and pole technology evolves.



- Weight is a major factor for hikers and those who want to keep their pack-weight to a minimum.
- If you're camping out of a car or simply 'base-camping' without lugging your tent around every day, don't worry too much about weight. Why pay more for something that you won't benefit from?

Spares and Accessories:

Most tent kits are sold with all poles and pegs included – you shouldn't have to worry about buying these separately.

- If you decide to take a few spare pegs, this a great idea. Consider investing in a groundsheet (see more on that later in this piece).
- A small hammer to knock in your pegs is a great idea too, especially if pack-weight isn't an issue.

Tent Preparation:

Before you leave for your adventure, practice pitching your tent for the first time at home, or a friend's house.

- This will help you familiarize yourself with all the components, and ensure you have everything you need.
- You'll feel far more confident setting it up in the bush if you've done it already, and you'll remember any of the mistakes you made the first time around!
- Take special note of how the tent was folded when you first unpacked it. Tents often have a preferred method of storage, and some will be difficult to pack up if you fold them the wrong way.
- A 'dry-run' at home is also an opportunity to dispose of any plastic/cardboard packaging the tent may have been sold with. It'll be impossible to dispose of on the track, and it'll just take up extra weight and space in your pack or vehicle.



Practice pitching your tent for the first time at home, or a friend's house. Image: Coleman
There's more to pitching a tent than just picking a camping spot with a great view. Safety and comfort must also be primary concerns when selecting your tent site.

Choose Your Site Carefully

As a minimum, you'll need a flat area of ground with enough space for your tent – plus a bare patch for your entry/exit door.



Can't Find Flat Ground?

Make sure to orient your tent so you're sleeping with your head up-hill and your feet down-hill. Sleeping 'upside-down' is very uncomfortable, and sideways to a slope will mean you roll off your sleeping mat mid-slumber!

Whatever you do, don't pitch your tent...

- Under gum trees – they will drop limbs, often in the cold of night and without warning. You don't want to be under one if this happens.
- On ridgelines, hilltops and saddles – while spectacular, these are highly exposed locations. You'll feel the full brunt of wind, rain, and lightning. If you must pitch in an exposed location, find a spot just below a ridgeline or high point, ideally in the lee of the wind.
- In dry creek beds – flash flooding can occur throughout Australia at any time of the year. Don't risk fate.
- Too close to active watercourses – especially if the weather has been wet. They can rise surprisingly fast and wash an unlucky camper away overnight!



As a minimum, you'll need a flat area of ground with enough space for your tent. Image: Coleman

Keep Clear of Your Campfire or Stove

Most tents will not survive a naked flame or even a stray ember. Pick a site well clear of these campsite essentials.

Protect Your Tent Floor

Clear away sticks and stones. A groundsheet is a good idea – these are canvas (or similar) sheets, which are sometimes bundled with tents but often sold separately (check out some of our package deals). They will have the same footprint as your tent and will take the brunt of the dirt, moisture, and damage to the underside of your tent. They will also contribute a little to keeping you warm at night, mildly insulating from the cold earth.

Ben and Lauren discuss groundsheets on the Snowys Camping Show podcast:

You've chosen your tent and you've found a campsite – it's now time to actually set up your tent, pack it away, and learn good tent maintenance.

As mentioned, today's tent designs are more diverse and innovative than ever – so knowing how to pitch one with minimum fuss sometimes takes practice!



Let's Pitch Your Tent!

1. Unroll your tent on to your groundsheet. Once oriented, notice that the bottom of the tent has its own peg loops. It's a good idea to knock the corner pegs into the ground before any 'side' and remaining pegs on the tent's base.
2. Now for your poles. Most tents will require you to either straighten out sets of poles held together with elastic roping, or just click together the sections to form a single pole.
3. Most modern tents have sleeves or plastic clips running around their exterior. Once your poles are assembled, look for any colour-coded sleeves corresponding to pole colours. These will indicate which sleeves you'll need to feed the poles through. If there isn't colour-coding or matching symbols, just go ahead and insert your poles as required.
4. Poles will often interface with the tent's base near the peg loops, sometimes with small metal rings (to house pole-end spigots) or small metal spigots which insert into the end of a hollow pole. Look for these, and allow the poles to flex and insert as required.



Poles will often interface with the tent's base near the peg loops. Image: Oztent

By now, your tent should be looking like... a tent!

Hopefully, you can see your tent taking shape after inserting and/or clipping the poles to the tent's outer sleeves. You're almost finished.

1. The tent's fly is like its raincoat. It will keep the tent itself dry and warm. It will also protect the fabric from the worst of the sun and extend the life of your tent. Most of the time, it's a good idea to put your tent fly on. You may only want to leave it off if you are 100% sure of good, dry weather or if it's a very hot night! Most tents are sold complete with fly.
2. Most tent flies are installed by simply placing them over the tent, bringing the edges down to the ground and knocking in the pegs through the peg loops provided. Again - attempt the corners first, then the sides.
3. Because they bear the brunt of the weather, tent flies also have guy ropes. These stabilise the tent, help keep the fly separate from the tent itself, and minimise the fly flapping in the wind. Guy ropes are thin ropes with a small figure-8-type metal buckle, which has them adjustable in length. This is handy for exact positioning of the pegs, as well as tensioning the rope to maximise your tent's stability in windy conditions.
4. Finally, pack up all your tent bags (pole bag, peg bag, tent bag, etc.) and store them in a safe place within your tent. Done!

Packing, Storage, and Maintenance

Packing up your tent is very much the same as pitching it, only in reverse.



- It's a skill to fold and roll up your tent to fit back into its bag. Take note of how it originally came folded and rolled – this is often the best way to pack it up.
- When packing up a wet tent, there are good and not-so-good ways to approach this. Consider pre-folding the tent so that dry parts stay in contact with dry parts, and wet parts fold against wet parts. This can help to ensure that it's dryer next time you set it up.
- On arriving home, *always* set up your tent and/or wash it, and let it air-dry once. If you don't have space to set it up, hang it from a few points on the washing line if you have to. Leaving it packed up and dirty will encourage the growth of mildew and rot, which will ruin your investment!
- Setting your tent up at home post-trip is also your opportunity to identify any holes or tears in the fabric. Most tents are sold with a repair kit included; make use of it and your tent will remain safe and dry for as long as you need it!



Each tent has its own unique characteristics. Image: Coleman

If you need further information to the above, I encourage you to read through the tent's manuals and documentation to ensure your investment is protected. Each tent will have its own unique characteristics.

The friendly staff at [Snowys](#) can also help you with pointers and clarification on anything we've discussed. Enjoy your new tent in the great outdoors (and don't trip over those guy ropes)!

Ready to hit the road with your new tent? Do you have a tent that's tricky to pitch? Tell us about it in the comments section below.