

# TENTS AND SEASONALITY



## Three-season Tents

By far the most popular choice of most people, 3-season tents are lightweight shelters designed for the relatively temperate conditions of spring, summer and fall. They are usually equipped with ample mesh panels to boost air flow. Mesh panels keep out insects but can still let in powdery blowing sand. Properly pitched with a taut rainfly, 3-season tents can withstand downpours but are not the best choice for sustained exposure to harsh storms, violent winds or heavy snow.

The primary functions of 3-season tents: Keep you dry during rain or light snow, Shield you from bugs, Provide privacy.

## Extended-season Tents

Extended-season (3+ season) tents are engineered for prolonged 3-season usage, suitable for summer use but also trips in early spring and late fall when moderate snow may be encountered. Their goal: offer a balance of ventilation, strength and warmth-retention.



Typically they include 1 or 2 more poles and fewer mesh panels than pure 3-season models. This makes them sturdier and warmer than their 3-season cousins. Heavier, too, but not by huge amounts. Cousins of a vanishing breed known as convertible tents (with removable pole sections), extended-season tents are good choice for backpackers who make frequent trips to exposed, high-elevation destinations. While very sturdy, they are not as fully fortified for harsh winter weather as 4-season tents.

## Mountaineering/Expedition/4-season Tents



Engineered to withstand fierce winds and substantial snow loads, mountaineering tents can be used in any season. Their chief function, though, is to stand firm in the face of seriously inhospitable weather, principally in winter or above treeline.

They use more poles and heavier fabrics than 3-season tents and thus unavoidably weigh more. Their rounded dome designs eliminate flat roof spaces where snow can collect. They offer few mesh panels and rainflies that extend close to the ground. This hinders ventilation and can make them feel warm and stuffy in mild weather. But when foul winds begin to howl, a 4-season tent provides a reassuring place of refuge.

## Minimalist Tents and Shelters

Minimalists, that small but earnest coterie of serious ounce-counting wilderness travelers, can choose from several options:

### Ultralight (UL) Tents



Ultralight tents achieve their low weight primarily through the use of lightweight fabrics. Like other ultralight items, a UL tent is special-care gear that requires conscientious treatment by its owner.

Care must be taken when selecting a campsite, for instance. If a site is rocky, rooty or littered with barbed pinecones, any potential fabric-gouging material must be avoided or cleared away. Otherwise, seek a different site.

Even mesh used for UL tents has become downright wispy—fantastic for minimizing weight, but care must be taken to avoid snagging or strafing the material. Footprints (ground sheets) are usually a wise addition to any UL tent to protect lightweight floor materials. But that means carrying a few more ounces in your pack.

Pros: Low weight, less space occupied in a pack.

Cons: Relatively delicate when compared to 3-season tents.

## **Bivy Sacks**



A bivy is a waterproof, breathable barrier for your sleeping bag—a low-profile setup where you and your bag are the banana and the bivy is the peel. A bivy consists of a waterproof floor and a waterproof/breathable upper layer—the same strategy used in single-wall tents, just in a smaller, tighter package.

"Bivy sack" is short for bivouac sack. Bivies were initially made popular by climbers, and minimalist backpackers later embraced them. Some models are basic sacks with nothing more than a face hole; others offer some fully enclosed, pole-supported head space with mesh netting to separate you from bugs.

As long as you don't mind sleeping in what can feel like a confined space, bivies are excellent weight-savers. Their chief downside: no sit-up space. It is challenging (some would say close to impossible) to change clothes inside a bivy. So, if insects are troublesome and you want to change into or strip down to sleeping attire, you will be exposed to bugs as you peel off clothing before you slip into your bivy.

Pros: Saves space and weight.

Cons: Can feel confining; on models without netting, user is vulnerable to bugs.

**(Continued on back)**

## Hammocks



Backpacking hammocks are another minimalist favorite. They feature tarp-like rainflies, bug netting and a clever, bottoms-up entry point. They are an acquired taste, but they are quite popular among converts. Backpacking hammocks are another minimalist favorite.

Pros: Light and compact.

Cons: Setup requires a learning curve; so does sleeping in midair. Ideal dual-tree setup is not always easy to locate.