

Hiking Boot Care

The old adage, *"Take care of your equipment and it will take care of you"* is an important truth to live by for campers, hikers and backpackers, and one that is absolutely true when it comes to your hiking boots. Throughout a long day of hiking, you'll want your boots to be well-fitted, comfortable and able to withstand the constant punishment of climbing up rocks, down hills and through streams.

It makes absolutely no sense to purchase an expensive pair of hiking boots if you don't know how to keep your hiking boots safe. Just remember that the boots are only the perfect boots if you learn how to take care of them. Taking a little extra time to care for your hiking boots can add years to their useful lives. There are a few different types of hiking boots and each type has its own maintenance. The following are some helpful hints and tips to help you maintain your hiking boots.

Waterproofing the Boots

Consult the manufacturer for the proper products to put on the boots for waterproofing. Whatever waterproof product is chosen, use a reputable brand product such as Nikwax for those expensive boots. Waterproof the boots before you use them for the first time. After returning from the wilderness, clean your boots and then when they are dry, make them waterproof so that they will stay dry once you return to the wilderness. When waterproofing your boots, try not to overdo it because you'll just be wasting excess product in the end. If your boots have a Gore-Tex lining, make sure to use silicon-based treatment on them instead of a wax-based one. This is to allow the boot to 'breathe' which is one of the functions of the special lining. Always make sure the attachment area where the boot and the sole meet have enough waterproofing. A very soft toothbrush or Q-tips will help get into those tough boot areas.

Clean the Boots

When you have finished using the hiking boots for the day and are ready to put them away, completely clean and wash the boots. Take the stones out of the bottom of the soles and remove all mud. Most fabric boots can be washed on the outside with non-detergent soap and water to remove built-up dirt. Leather boots can also be rinsed off, but repeated washing and drying can dry out the leather over time and make it brittle. A soft toothbrush with a little water will help clean those hard to get areas. If the boots become really scuffed, check to see if it is time to waterproof the hiking boots again. NOTE: If your boots are wet and dirty, it's best to dry them first, and then brush the dirt off.

Drying the Boots

Whenever possible, dry your boots completely after each trip. Remove the insoles to help aid in the drying process. Allow your hiking boots to air out in a shaded and ventilated spot, such as the garage with an open window. Keep the boots away from direct sunlight. Don't set your boots near a fire (or other heat source) to dry them more quickly, since high temperatures can damage boot materials and the cements used to hold them together. It might even effect how the boot fits. If you need to speed up the drying process, try stuffing dry newspaper inside your boots to absorb water. Replace the newspaper frequently for best results. The boots should dry slowly or else the leather might crack.

Smelly Boots

A light amount of regular foot powder or baking soda will remove most of the boot odor. Just don't overdo it and use light amounts.

Boot Storage

If you are a seasonal hiker and the boots are only used for a couple of seasons, don't store the boots in a cold attic or a hot basement for an extensive period of time. Keep the boots in a place that have normal air temperature. Always put them on every once and a while to keep the proper shape of the boot and also to keep the leather soft.

Break in the Boots

No boots can be used for the first time hiking without breaking in the boots first or your hiking experience will go downhill after the first mile. Wear the boots in an easy environment such as around the house. Then go for short walks around the block, etc. Once your feet feel ok, the boots are ready to go. If the boots still don't feel comfortable, bring them back to the retail store to see if any adjustment can be made. All hiking boots, especially leather ones, benefit from frequent cleaning and occasional conditioning with special boot treatments. These treatments condition leather and provide additional water protection to keep your feet dry.

Check the Laces

Always check the boot laces for potential lace breaks. Catch the defective laces at home and replace them before they break on the trail.

Footwear Repair

If the boot is starting to separate from the sole, use a rubber glue (such as Shoe Goo), not super glue (super glue will shatter) to glue them back together.