

Sleeping Bags

A sleeping bag would probably be the first piece of equipment to buy. It is not real expensive, it is kind of personal and it has alternative uses in the off season or after you lose your lust for backpacking (hope not) -- during sleepovers at friends' and relatives' houses or as a cocoon for watching TV on cold winter nights. Besides, on a typical backpacking trek, you spend about one-third of your time in your sleeping bag.

The basic criteria for choosing a sleeping bag should be:

- **Weight less than 3 ½ pounds for a 6' bag.** Shorter bags should be proportionately lighter and longer bags a little heavier. If it is low in weight, it will likely stuff into a small shape for packing. Sleeping bags are relatively bulky items. Tapered "mummy" bags (see pictures above) hold weight down and the heat in. Stay away from department store rectangular bags; they generally are low priced, less efficient heat preservers and usually weigh a minimum of seven pounds -- way too much for a 100 lb scout who needs to keep total pack weight below 25 lbs (25%).
- **The bag is rated for 20°-30° temperatures.** This is a good balance of weight and function, and the rating of the majority of bags on the market. Such bags span three seasons - Spring, Summer, and Fall. With additional clothing or a liner, they can go lower.
- **The bag uses synthetic fill of Hollofil, Quallofil or Polarguard.** Down is lightweight, stuffs into a small shape, is expensive and has great insulating qualities, but is disastrous when wet. Further, once wet, it is heavy and hard to dry. Leave down to the experienced crowd. Synthetic fill is more forgiving for newbie scouts. Don't worry too much about the outer shell of the bag; most are made of some form of serviceable washable nylon. Most synthetic bags wash and dry easily.
- **It fits your build.** If you are 5'4", why carry the weight for fitting a scout 6 feet tall? If you are 6'4", a standard 6' bag will be cramped. Most people will fit a 30" width bag -- lower weight. Those over 200lbs should stick to 32" widths and those very full bodied (well muscled) should consider "oversized" bags that are 36" wide.

So, what will you pay for such a bag? \$50 - \$150. Campmor (<http://www.campmor.com/> -- 1-800-226-7667) has many selections. You can request a free catalog. If you stick to the specifications above, you should be able to find a serviceable bag at a reasonable price.

Now a few hints on packing. During storage (non-use), sleeping bags should not be stuffed in small sacks because constriction can reduce the "loft", reducing its insulating qualities. When in use, stuff the bag into the smallest stuff sack it will fit. Some compression sacks use webbing to get size even lower. This is particularly important for internal frame packs because they go inside (lower zipper opening) and displace other gear. Size is not as crucial for external frame packs because they get strapped on the outside (bottom or top) of the frame pack. Stuff sacks should be lined with a plastic bag before inserting the sleeping bag. A "gooseneck" closure on the opening will keep the water out. External plastic bags work but tend to get snagged. **Never use your sleeping bag stuff sack as a bear bag.** The food smell gets transferred from the stuff sack to the sleeping bag. Do you want to be a bear lollipop?