



Nature, But Make It Doable

Beginner Camp Setup Guide

Your One-Night Test Drive

From Rookie Outdoor Woman — where beginners belong and confidence is earned one small win at a time.

One night is the perfect test drive. Not a week, not a week's worth of gear you don't own yet — one night. Borrow or rent a tent, pick a campground with bathrooms and a parking spot ten feet from your site, and find out if you even like this before you spend a dime on your own gear.

Print this. Save it to your phone. This is everything you need for night one — nothing you don't.

1 Pick Your Campground (10 minutes)

- ☐ Drive-up / car-camping site confirmed — no hiking in required
- ☐ Bathrooms on site (real ones, not “vault toilet, bring your own everything”)
- ☐ Parking within sight of your tent
- ☐ Reservation confirmed and confirmation saved or screenshotted
- ☐ Checked recent reviews for noise, bugs, and cell service

2 Borrow or Rent — or Join a Group Trip

You do not need to own any of this yet. A friend's garage, a local gear library, or a weekend rental all count. Some parks and outfitters also run beginner group campouts, where the gear and the know-how are already handled.

- ☐ Tent — borrowed, rented, or already yours (set it up once at home first, always), OR a group campout booked instead
- ☐ Sleeping bag rated for the night's low temperature
- ☐ Sleeping pad or air mattress (the ground is colder and harder than you remember)
- ☐ Camp chair — comfort is not cheating

Camping with a group your first time isn't cheating. It's a smart way to learn the ropes without owning them yet.

3 Tell Someone (The Safety Text)

Text this to a person who will actually notice if you go quiet — before you lose signal:

“Camping tonight at [Campground], site [#]. Arriving [time], heading home [time] tomorrow. I'll text when I'm packed up. If you don't hear from me by [time], call the campground office, then call me.”

- ☐ Text sent before you lose service
- ☐ Campground office phone number saved in your phone

A tent with an address is still an address. Someone should have it.

4 Pack the Bare Minimum

- ☐ Water — more than you think, especially for coffee and dishes
- ☐ Headlamp or flashlight (plus backup batteries)
- ☐ Firestarter + matches or lighter, if the site allows fires
- ☐ Simple food that needs no real cooking for meal one
- ☐ Layers — it gets colder at night than the forecast makes it sound
- ☐ Pillow from home (a real one; you'll thank yourself at 2 a.m.)
- ☐ Trash bag for packing out what you bring in

5 Set Up Camp Before Dark

- ☐ Arrive with at least an hour of daylight left
- ☐ Tent pitched on level ground, away from low spots that collect water
- ☐ Rainfly attached, even if the sky looks clear
- ☐ Headlamp tested and kept within reach after dark
- ☐ Food and trash stored in the car overnight, not in the tent

6 When to Change Plans

Your car is ten feet away for exactly this reason. Any one of these is a fine reason to use it:

- ☐ The site doesn't match what you booked or expected
- ☐ Weather turns worse than forecast
- ☐ You're cold, can't get comfortable, or can't sleep
- ☐ You just... don't want to be there anymore

Sleeping in your car in the parking lot still counts as camping. So does going home. You already won by showing up.

That's the Whole Guide

A borrowed tent, a bathroom nearby, and a car parked close enough to bail. That's the whole barrier to entry. Everything else — cooking real meals outside, choosing your own gear, camping somewhere without bathrooms, going for more than one night — is its own conversation. This guide is here to get you through one successful night. The rest comes with practice.

Want more like this? Rookie Outdoor Woman has guides, stories, and a community waiting for you when you're ready. No rush. No hierarchy. You decide when and how to level up.

This guide is informational and not medical advice. Adjust for your health needs and local conditions. When in doubt, choose the conservative option and camp another night.