

How to Do It »

Treading Lightly

Headed to the backcountry? Read this Leave No Trace refresher first

You're setting up camp near a beautiful creek but can't remember how far from the water to dispose of waste. Is it 30, 50 or 100 feet away?

Think farther. The recommended safe zone is 200 feet from water, camp or trails.

Many of us have been exposed to the "Leave No Trace" principles for minimal-impact trail use but may be foggy on the details. In this article, Leave No Trace experts provide tips to help you enjoy your outdoor experience while minimizing impacts on the environment.

Know Before You Go

Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.

"Planning ahead and preparation is often where it starts," says Dave Winter, outreach manager for the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. For example, if campfires aren't permitted, be sure to pack extra layers and a lamp. Check in with the land management agency to find out about trail conditions, snow levels and campfire policy. "If you've done your homework and research, that will help you to make the best decisions."



This hiker found a durable surface to set-up on in the Goat Rocks Wilderness. Photo by Joel Fletcher.

Dispose Of Waste

Properly: Pack It In, Pack It Out

"There is room for improvement in this area," says Mountaineers conservation manager Sarah Kruger, who has seen too many examples of poorly buried waste in the backcountry. Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, 200 feet from water, trails or camp, and pack out toilet paper. "Waste management practices vary by environment. Burying your waste is not a good option on snow, glaciers or in arid and alpine zones. Some land managers require you to pack it out in heavily used or sensitive areas." Sarah also recommends a number of products available that make it easier to transport human waste, like Wag Bags. To protect riparian areas and water quality, carry dishwater 200 feet from

streams and lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. When washing dishes, she suggests bringing a strainer to separate out the food bits. Pack out food waste and scatter dishwater to avoid attracting wildlife. There's also the problem of microtrash. Small bits of waste, like orange peels, twist ties and apple cores, are often left on the trail. These also need to be packed out.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.

Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams. Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites. In high-impact sites, tents, traffic routes and kitchen areas should be concentrated on already impacted areas. In pristine areas, disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails. Dave Winters suggests hiking in less-used areas and to avoid traveling during peak times. Check in with the land manager or a retail store (like REI) to get information on alternate trails. "Have fun, spend time outdoors, but minimize impact."

Leave What You Find

Leave camping areas as you found them. Do not dig trenches around your tents or construct lean-tos, tables, chairs or other rudimentary improvements. If you clear an area of surface rocks, twigs or pinecones, replace these items before leaving.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

Use a lightweight stove for cooking, and enjoy a candle lantern for light.

Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. Keep fires small. Don't saw or break off branches for kindling. Use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.

Ericka Berg

Ericka is a new WTA member who, of course, always follows the Leave No Trace principles.

Respect Wildlife

Observe wildlife from a safe distance, and use a powerful telephoto lens for photographing animals up close. Food storage and disposal practices will vary depending on the animals that frequent the area, so think about this as you plan. Help prevent wild creatures from becoming habituated to human food by properly storing food and securing trash. Control dogs at all times, or leave them at home. Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: while mating, nesting or raising young.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.

It's annoying to settle into a campground only to hear your neighbors making a racket late into the night. Allow the sounds of nature to prevail. Avoid using loud voices and making lots of noise when camping and hiking. What about trail courtesy? The rule is to yield to other trail users. Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock or hikers.

Leave No Trace advocate and WTA board member Jeff Chapman encourages sharing educational information, like circulating Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly! brochures and attending peer training, rather than giving lectures on the trail.

Leaving no trace is everyone's responsibility. As Jeff says, "Washington state has a rapidly growing population and we all need to take extra steps to protect the environment so that everyone can enjoy their outdoor experiences. This means that all trail users, including mountain bikers, equestrians, day hikers, off-road vehicle users, berry pickers and mountain climbers, must practice Leave No Trace principles when visiting both front and backcountry."♦

The Leave No Trace Seven Principles have been reprinted with the permission of the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. For more information, visit www.LNT.org.

Improve Your Skills

Leave No Trace Workshops

The Mountaineers provide low-impact recreation skill clinics and two-day Leave No Trace Trainer Courses. For more information, contact Sarah Kruger at sarahk@mountaineers.org.

Online Awareness Course

Think you have the principles down? Test yourself at www.LNT.org/training/OnlineCourse.

Book Review »

Trail Meals for Vegans and Everybody Else

Laurie Ann March released her first backcountry cookbook in 2008 with recipes to tempt us all, and her second book looks just as scrumptious! *Another Fork in the Trail* specializes in backcountry cooking for vegans, vegetarians and those who require gluten-free diets. Don't let that scare you meat-a-tarians off. While the recipes in the book satisfy some or all of these special diets, they also work well as dishes that pair with meat dishes, or could be adapted by meat lovers with the addition of their preferred animal protein.

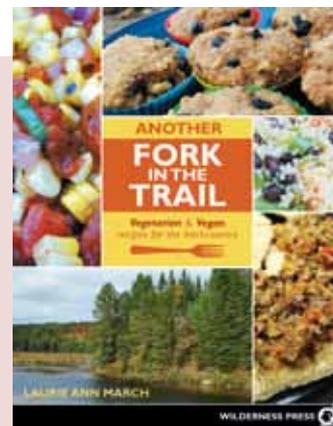
This book is full of unique ingredients. If you are tired of the same old camp cooking, this book is sure to refresh your culinary arsenal. Dishes are creative but not so exotic that you have to go to Kathmandu to find them. If you are new to things like tapioca flour and mushroom powder, the book has a section describing special ingredients and substitutions, including gluten-free flours. There is a primer on dehydrated foods, both commercially available and making your own, in case you haven't ventured into dehydrating your own foods yet. You'll also find many dishes with ingredients you will recognize as backcountry staples.

Dishes are generally fresh and tempting, like Gazpacho and White Bean and Artichoke Dip. Many of the recipes are easy to prepare and quick, but a fair number of dishes are more intricate and will challenge your backcountry cooking skills. In the chapter "More Elaborate Dishes," you'll find a recipe for Fire-Roasted Moroccan Sweet Potato Salad that includes pomegranate seeds and saffron. That way you can sit on the Pacific Crest Trail and pretend you are in Greece or Morocco if you want.

Like Laurie's first book, each recipe is organized with "At Home" and "At Camp" directions that are thorough and easy to follow. March uses symbols that allow you to scan the recipe and easily see if it is lightweight, gluten-free or vegan, and she points out recipes where eggs and milk are used. The book is organized by meal time—breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, desserts. For those of you who have made enough decisions lately, there is a "Menu Planning" section at the beginning, too.

Laurie has brought exciting new ingredients and recipes to backcountry cooking. I can't wait to try some more the next time I hit the trail.

—Review by Erika Klimecky



Even if you aren't a vegetarian at home, it can be safer and more convenient to eat like one in the woods. Dishes like those featured in March's book make it a tasty endeavor.