
Survival Shelters



If you find yourself in a situation where you must spend a night outside, you need to take action to decrease your exposure to the weather and elements. You will have to construct a shelter using what you have in your survival kit, or using materials available to you. You have to insure that you allow sufficient time to build a shelter in addition to your other survival priorities.

When planning to construct a shelter, you must consider the following:

- The type of protection or shelter you will need
- The direction of the prevailing winds, to ensure that the back of your shelter is exposed the wind, not the front if at all possible
- Will the shelter will adequately protect you from the environment and conditions (wind, rain, snow)
- How much time it will require to build a shelter
- Do you have the tools to build it, or can you make improvised tools
- Do you have the materials needed to build it

Before you can effectively answer these questions, you will need to become familiar with how to construct various types of shelters and the materials you will need to build them. Some of the easiest types of shelters to construct can be fashioned from items that you already have in your survival kit, such as a poncho, or plastic sheeting or even a large plastic bag. Other more work-intensive shelters can be constructed using only materials found in the environment where you find yourself.

Remember, not only must you consider the time it will take for you to choose your site, collecting all of the materials that you will need in constructing your shelter, and building the actual shelter; but you must also consider all of your additional survival priorities, like gathering sufficient firewood to last you the time that you will be spending in the shelter that you are planning to construct.



Poncho Lean-To

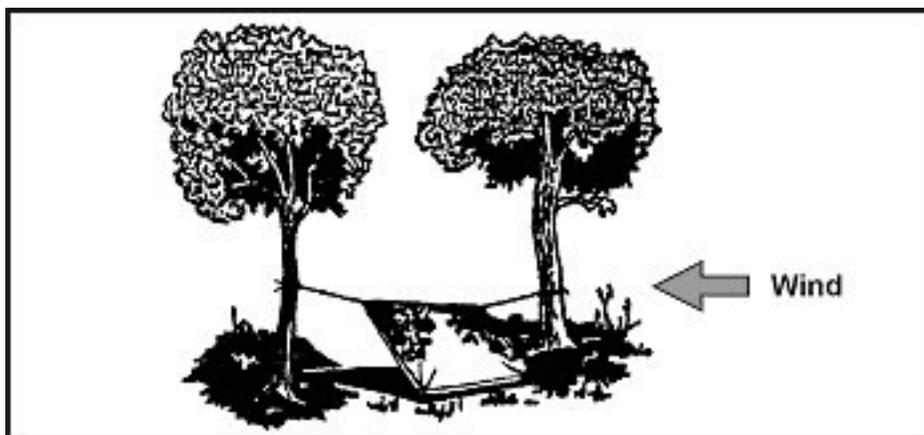
It takes only a short time and minimal equipment to set-up a poncho lean-to.

To make a poncho lean-to you will need:

- a poncho
- 8 to 20 feet of parachute cord
- three 15 inch long stakes
- two trees or two poles 4 to 8 feet apart

To construct a poncho lean to:

- Tie off the hood of your poncho. Pull the drawstring tight, roll the hood long-ways, fold it and tie it off with the drawstring
- Tie the cord about waist high on the trees or uprights. Use a round turn and two half hitches with a quick-release knot
- Drape the poncho over the horizontal cord
- Pull a loop of the cord through one of the top corner grommets, and secure it by slipping a small stick under the loop
- Repeat the same for the opposite corner grommet draped over the horizontal cord
- Pull a small loop of the horizontal cord through the remaining grommets, and slip a small stick under each to secure the poncho
- Anchor it to the ground, putting a stake through a cord tied to the grommet, and pushing it into the ground



Attach a drip stick (about a 6 inch stick) to each rope about 2 inches from the grommet. These drip sticks will keep rainwater from running down the ropes into the lean-to.



Tying drip strings (about 10 inches long) to each grommet along the poncho's top edge will allow the water to run to and down the line without dripping into the shelter, and by setting up a method of collecting the run-off, it will give you a quick source of drinking water.

If you plan to use the lean-to for more than one night, or you expect a lot of rain or snow, you can make a center support for the lean-to.

Attach one end of a line to the poncho hood and the other end to an overhanging branch

Tighten the line, and make sure there is no slack

Another method is to place a stick upright under the center of the horizontal cord supporting the lean-to.

For additional protection from wind and rain, place some brush, leaves or dried grass along the side edges of your lean-to.

To reduce heat loss to the ground, place some type of insulating material, such as leaves or pine needles, inside your lean-to to build-up the floor

To increase the stability of your shelter in high winds, lower the lean-to height by making two changes. First, secure the support lines to the trees at knee height (not at waist height) using two knee-high sticks in the two center grommets (sides of lean-to). Second, angle the poncho to the ground, securing it with loops of cord and stakes.

Poncho Tent

This tent protects you from the elements on two sides. It has, however, less usable space and area than a lean-to.

To make a poncho tent you will need:

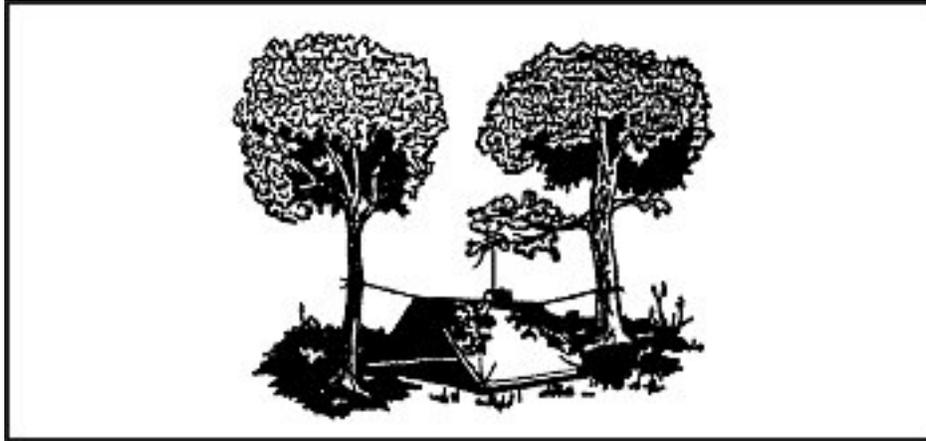
- a poncho,
- 10 to 20 feet of parachute cord
- six stakes about 15 inches in length
- two trees 4 to 8 feet apart

To make the tent:

- Tie off the poncho hood in the same way as the poncho lean-to
- Tie the cord about waist high on the trees or uprights. Use a round turn and two half hitches with a quick-release knot
- Center and drape the poncho over the horizontal cord
- Pull a loop of the cord through one of the center corner grommets, and secure it by slipping a small stick under the loop



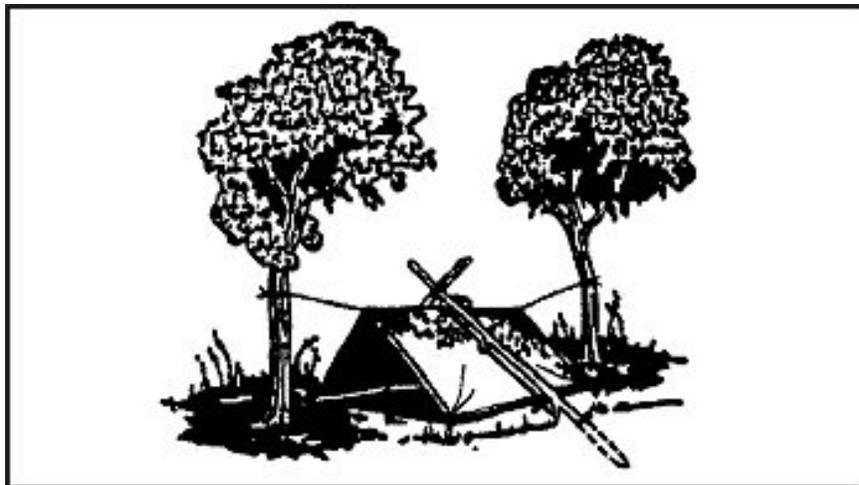
- Repeat the same process for the opposite side
- Draw one side of the poncho tight and secure it to the ground by pushing stakes through a loop of cord tied to each of the grommets
- Follow the same procedure on the other side



If you need a center support, use the same methods as for the poncho lean-to, but in this set-up place a center stick under the horizontal cord under the hood area supporting the cord, not the poncho material.

You can also build an A-Frame support over the outside center of the tent:

- Use two 6 to 8 foot long sticks
- Lash or secure the poles together to form the A-frame
- Push the ends of the poles into the ground, or support with rocks or additional lengths of cord.
- Tie the hood's drawstring to the A-frame to support the center of the tent





Single Pole Poncho Tent

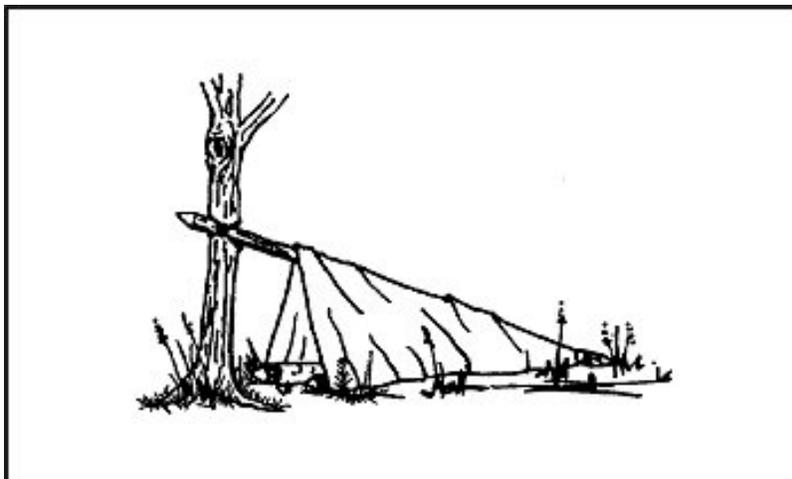
This shelter also takes a short time and minimal equipment to build, and is a hybrid of the poncho lean-to and the tent. It works well in high wind and snowy environments, but does not allow a great amount of space to move inside the shelter.

To make a poncho tent you will need:

- a poncho,
- 10 to 20 feet of parachute cord
- one 6 to 8 foot long stick or staff
- one trees or stump about 3 feet in height
- six stakes about 10 - 15 inches in length

To construct a single pole tent:

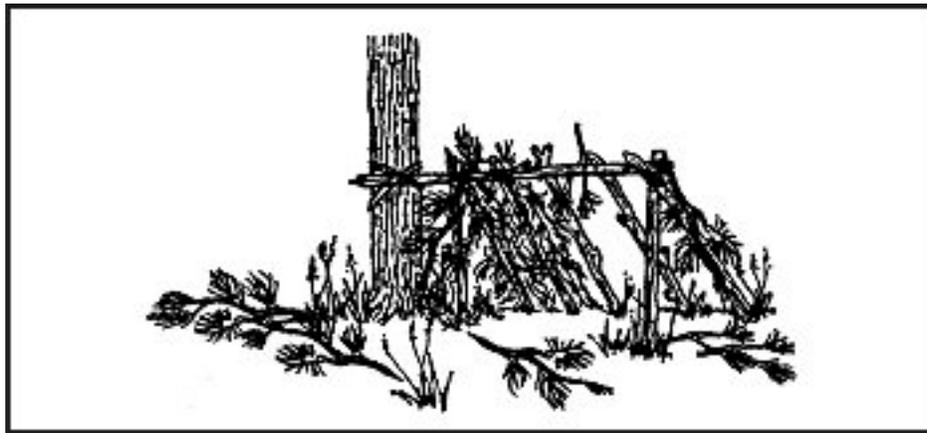
- Secure one end of the long pole to the tree trunk or stump. It may be simply placed on top of the stump, but you will need some means of securing it to prevent your shelter from being blown down in windy condition.
- Place the poncho over the pole leaving sufficient space to enter the shelter at the high end.
- Secure the bottom of the poncho using a weight of some sort - a rock or log.
- Secure the corners of the poncho closest to the upright support using stakes through a loop of cord tied through the corner grommets, keeping the poncho snug over the pole.
- Fold the edges of the poncho at the low-end under to secure the poncho. This will provide some flooring to the inside of the shelter. You can keep the folded-under edges secure by placing a weight on the flap.



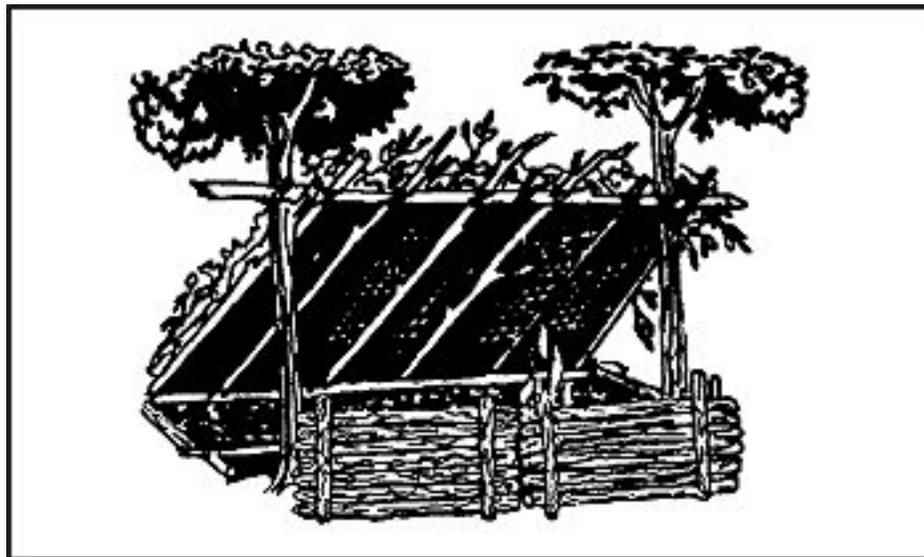


Traditional Lean-To

The traditional lean-to is build in the same fashion as the poncho lean-to, but instead of making use of a poncho, you use natural materials found in your surrounding environment. To build the overhead cover, you use sticks and tree boughs layered against a main beam pole. Building a traditional lean-to is very time and labor intensive, and should only be constructed in a situation where you do not have a poncho or any other material that can be used to fashion covering, or you will be remaining for a long period of time.



Early construction of a traditional lean-to



A completed traditional lean-to with a fire-reflecting wall



Debris Hut

The debris hut is constructed in the same fashion as the single pole poncho tent using sticks, branches, tree boughs and any other natural debris foraged from the environment where you will be setting up your survival camp. The branches and boughs are layered against the central pole to create the shelter cover. In a situation where you are lucky enough to find a downed tree, it can serve as a natural foundation of a shelter.

A debris hut is also a time consuming and labor intensive construction project, but a well constructed debris hut provides a secure well insulated shelter that can but used for a multiple night stay in one location.

