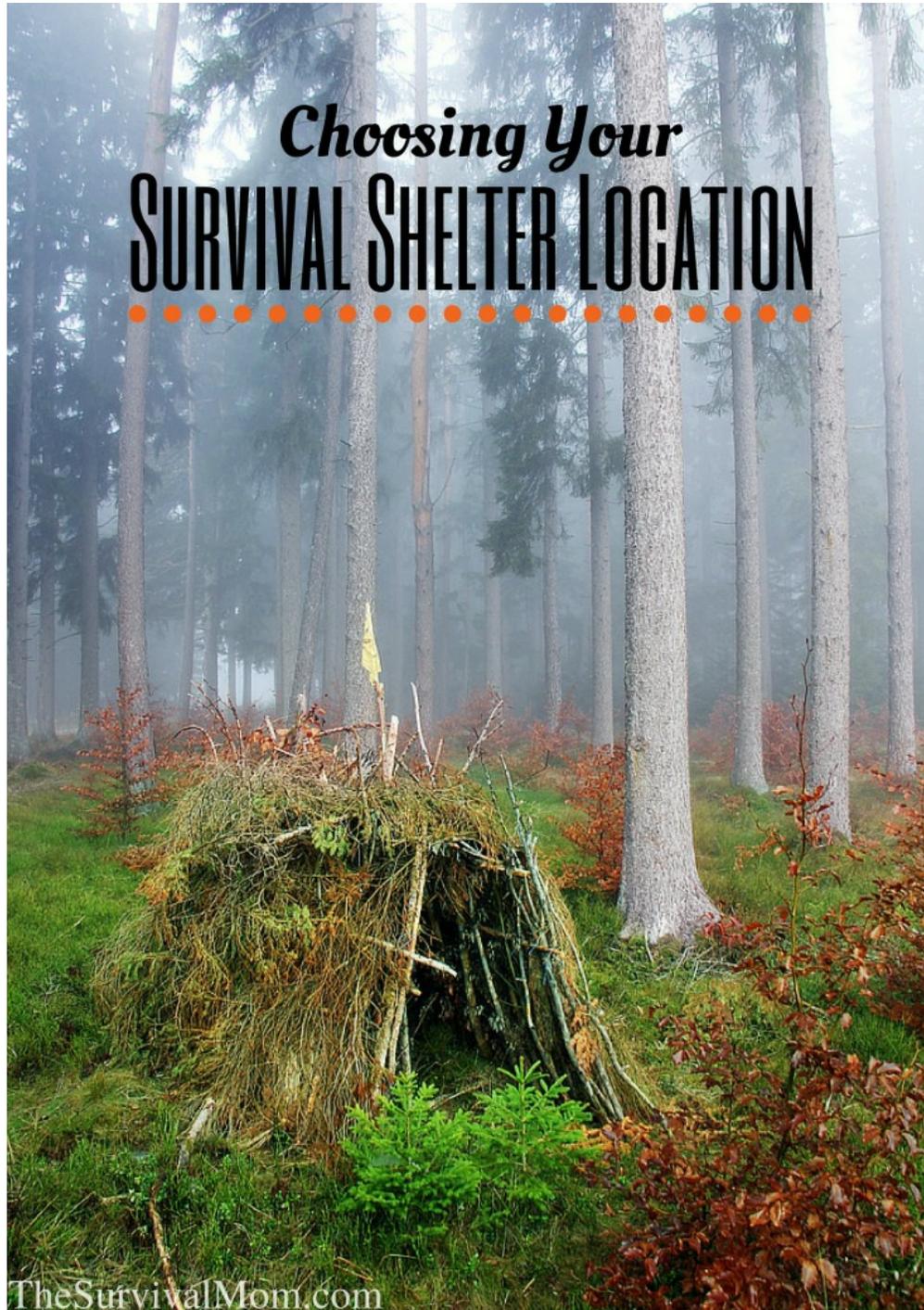


Choosing Your Survival Shelter Location

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There you are, lost in the wilderness. You zigged when you should have zagged and have finally come to terms with the thought that you're going to have to spend the night in the rough. With only an hour or so of daylight left, it is past time to choose your survival shelter location and get going on building it. Thankfully, you have a few supplies with you, such as a knife, an emergency blanket, and some paracord. You've also taken the time to study a bit about wilderness survival so cobbling together a small debris hut or lean to shouldn't be too difficult or time-consuming.

Before you begin construction, though, you should take the time to find a truly suitable location for the shelter. Doing so will help to avoid adding to your list of woes. Keep in mind, too, that all of these suggestions apply whether you're in an actual survival situation or if you're just out camping for the night. More than one casual hiker or Scout troop has been caught unawares and had a bad campsite turn a fun outing into a bad experience, or worse. Not to be dramatic, but **your survival shelter location could determine if you survive or not.**

Building materials.

First, if you are building some or all of the shelter from natural materials, such as a debris hut, you will probably want to locate your shelter near said supplies. It makes little sense to carry branches, logs, and such great distances if you don't have to do so. Hopefully you'll only be staying in the shelter a single night but, just in case, **if you find a water source in the area, position your shelter near it, but not directly on it.** We're talking about conservation of energy, here. The less energy you expend having to harvest water, the more energy you'll have for other necessary tasks.

You may also choose to use a natural cave or boulder to shelter, or gather rocks together to form a wind break for your shelter. Gathering rocks has the secondary purpose of leaving a more comfortable area for you to lay down and sleep, as does gathering sticks for a debris hut or fire. The area under large trees is often sheltered from rain and snow, making it worth at least looking around under any large trees. Be careful of roots both in terms of where you are sleeping and where you build a fire. The last thing you want to do is accidentally set an entire tree on fire because the roots were in your fire pit!

You may also choose to gather materials such as dried grass, fir branches, or other softer materials to put down inside your shelter as a softer, warmer place to sleep. Bare ground is generally cooler than people, especially at night. The cooler temperatures can make sleeping uncomfortable, so putting an insulating layer (such as those listed above) can do a lot for your health and comfort.

Shelter location.

Next, take a moment to look above your chosen location. If you see any large dead branches, find a different spot. **Those branches are called "widow makers."** You probably won't want to be underneath one should it break loose and come crashing down. Sheltering under a large tree may give you a bit of added protection from the weather. There is a reason there is often a dry spot under large trees after even a heavy rain or snow fall.

Take a look around and see if there is evidence of large amounts of rain runoff. While the sky might be clear now, who knows what the night might hold. If you're in a gully or ditch, it might turn into a fast moving stream after a sudden downpour. If there is a log, line of rocks, or other natural structure, it could funnel water in a particular direction and you won't want to put your shelter at that spot, but one side of it could also be less windy – and therefore warmer.

There is an awful lot of wildlife that is nocturnal, meaning the critters are most active after sundown. **If your shelter is smack dab in the middle of the forest's version of an interstate highway, you're going to have a lot of visitors.** Some of them might not be very happy that you are blocking traffic. While in a true survival situation we might be looking forward to bagging one or two Happy Meals on legs, you probably don't want them crawling into bed with you or bumping into your shelter all night long. Remember to keep an eye out for buys when you choose your location.

If there is a patch of poison ivy, oak, etc. in the area, put your shelter in a place where you won't be likely to walk straight into the poison. This is more of an issue for middle of the night bathroom pit-stops because you won't be able to see anything and you want to minimize the chances you will walk through it, or use it for toilet paper.

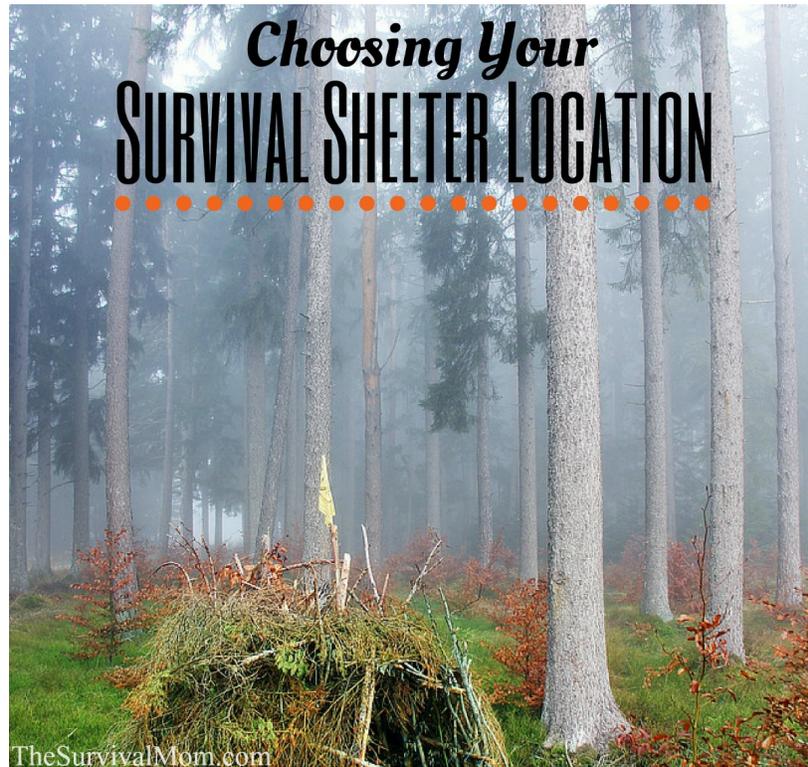
Shelter orientation.

You should also plan out the orientation of your shelter. The sun may shine straight into it and wake you up. Do you want that? (The answer may be yes, or you may need to sleep longer.)

You don't want the prevailing wind coming directly into the mouth or opening of the shelter, unless you know the night will be hot and the breeze welcome. This is doubly important if you're building your fire near the opening of the shelter! The last thing you want is to have smoke and burning embers blowing in your face. If warmth is a concern, and it almost always is, build a reflecting wall of logs near the shelter opening, then make your fire between that wall and your shelter. You can use your Mylar blanket, if you have one, to reflect more heat toward you.

By giving just a little thought ahead of time, you can dramatically improve your situation and avoid further risks of injury.

Jim Cobb contributed to this article.



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