FIELD GUIDE · NO. 08

A-Frame Tarp Shelter

The simplest, most useful tarp pitch: a tight ridgeline, even drape, and corners held snug.



FROM THE BOOK

1. The A-frame is the simplest and most useful tarp shelter. Stretch a ridgeline tightly between two trees or other sturdy anchors, drape the tarp evenly over it, and secure the corners to the ground.
2. Pitched properly, it sheds rain well, provides excellent protection from the wind, and creates enough interior space for one or two people, depending on tarp size. The book's comparison lists it as a good all-around shelter for rain, wind, and overnight camping; it does require two anchor points or trekking poles.
3. Keep the ridgeline taut. A loose line sags, collects rain, and puts extra strain on the fabric and tie-outs. A tight ridgeline sheds water better and is generally quieter on windy nights.
4. Pull each corner snug before you secure it. Stakes work when the ground allows; rocks, logs, or other natural anchors work when soil is rocky or frozen.
5. Before you tie a knot, think about the weather. Position the tarp so water runs away from your shelter, not toward it. If strong winds are expected, place the lower side of the tarp facing into the wind so it is less likely to act like a sail.
6. Avoid setting up where hillside runoff will pass through your sleeping area. A tarp pitched too high may let wind and rain blow underneath; one pitched too low may trap condensation. Small height adjustments often matter more than rebuilding the whole shelter.

PRACTICE IT

On a calm day, pitch an A-frame in the yard or at a campground. Practice getting the ridgeline tight and the corners snug, then walk around it and imagine how rain would run.