FIELD GUIDE · NO. 09

Lean-To Shelter

A fast, open-front pitch for mild weather — with less protection from wind and blowing rain.



FROM THE BOOK

1. A lean-to is a quick tarp or shelter setup with an open front. The book's shelter comparison lists it as fast to set up, with good ventilation and visibility, and useful for mild weather, cooking areas, and quick shelter.
2. The tradeoff is real: a lean-to offers less protection from wind and blowing rain than an A-frame. Choose it when conditions match, not as a default in a storm.
3. Before you pitch, think about the weather. If strong winds are expected, place the lower side of the tarp facing into the wind to reduce the fabric that can act like a sail.
4. Keep the ridgeline tight and the corners snug so the tarp does not sag or flap. Use stakes when the ground allows, or rocks and logs when it does not.
5. In warm weather, raising one side of a tarp can create an open shelter with plenty of airflow and shade. If heavy rain arrives, lowering the tarp closer to the ground improves protection from wind-driven rain, at the cost of some headroom.
6. The best setup is the one that matches the conditions in front of you and can be built before weather gets worse. Practice a few pitches before you need them.

PRACTICE IT

Pitch a lean-to or a one-side-raised tarp, then stand at the open front and check how wind would enter. Adjust the low side and ridgeline tension until the shelter feels stable.