

# Outdoor Skills: Building Shelters

Benzie Central High School & Academy After School

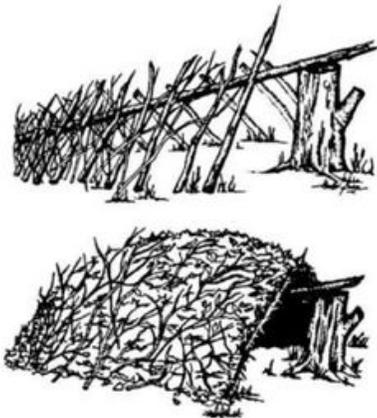
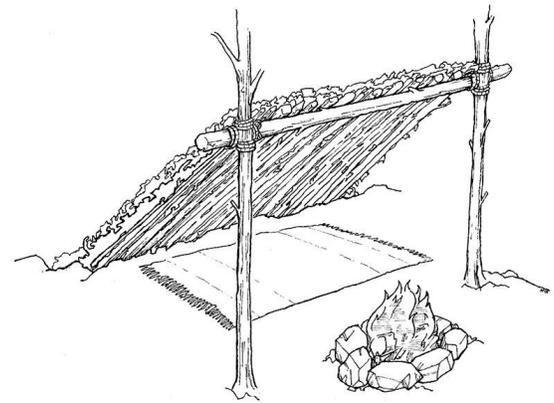


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*There are times when a person might need to build a shelter in a survival situation. Perhaps you've become lost in the woods, and night is soon approaching. Maybe your vehicle broke down in a remote area, and it will be hours before help arrives. Or you've been stranded by a storm and can't make it back home.*

*Building a shelter is basically like building a play-fort, but a properly built shelter will be much more protective from nature's elements, and could help preserve your life. Here are two simple survival shelter designs that are fairly easy to build.*

First is the **Lean-to Shelter**. The strongest lean-to shelter is built with two standing trees as vertical supports, preferably with branches that can be used to hold a horizontal cross bar in place. Rope, shoe or boot strings, wire, stringy bark, tree roots, etc. could be used to tie the cross bar in place if needed, as shown in the illustration. Walls can be easily added to this type of shelter. Place the back wall towards the prevailing wind for the greatest protection. Lean some long sticks or small logs to the horizontal cross bar, and cover them with pine boughs, leaves, grasses, bark, moss, etc. for greater protection and insulation. In an emergency situation, use whatever you can find, but if you're building a shelter for practice or fun, be mindful of the ecological harm you might cause by damaging living things, and avoid using live materials.



A second style of shelter is an **A-frame Shelter** that only uses one tree or stump for support. The illustration shows how one log can be leaned against a stump to form a ridgepole, and secondary logs or sticks are leaned against the ridgepole on both sides creating a very protective space within. Lean the ridgepole into the prevailing wind for maximum protection from the elements. Like the Lean-to above, the outside should be covered with boughs, leaves, grasses, moss, etc. for a covering. It's also a wise idea to add a thick layer of leaves and/or grasses down on the floor of your shelters to insulate your body from the ground during cooler weather.

**Outdoor Challenge:** Try to build your own survival shelter this week, using the techniques described above. Be mindful of what is needed for truly staying alive in an emergency situation. Take some photographs of your shelter(s) and share them with your family and friends. What materials did you use to build your shelter? What materials would you could have used, but were not available? Reflect on how you could improve your design for the next time.

