

Survival Shelters

Have you ever built a shelter or fort in the backyard? It can be fun to imagine that you are an explorer, surviving in the wilderness, using only the materials that nature provides. In a real survival situation, shelter is the most important priority, and with a bit of practice, you can learn to build the perfect shelter to keep you warm and cozy.

A shelter provides warmth, safety and peace of mind. Most experts agree that a debris shelter is the best and most simple style of shelter to build, and to get an idea of how to build one, you need only go ask a squirrel!

If you look closely at a squirrel dray, you will see what materials are best to use and how to weave them together to make a safe, stable structure. You can also observe the importance of insulation, and how a soft lining helps with warmth during the worst of weather.

When choosing a site for a shelter, it is all about location. Here are some ways that animals may choose locations and avoid dangerous situations:

- Never build close to water as these areas can be wet and prone to flooding during storms.
- Choose well-drained areas to avoid becoming damp or chilled.
- Never build near poisonous plants or on insect nests. Take some time to learn how to identify these dangers yourself: <http://ontariowildflowers.com/main/poisonous.php>.
- Never build in thick forests where it is often cold and damp, nor in the middle of fields where there are no windbreaks, increasing exposure to storms.
- Watch for danger areas like unstable trees and branches or unstable hillsides.

To begin building a shelter in your own habitat (ie: your backyard!), start with a sturdy ridgepole propped up on a stable support. The highest point should be no higher than your waist. Add the ribs of your shelter – stout sticks leaning on your ridgepole. Cover this with fine brush to create the skeleton of your shelter. Pile on lots of debris like dried leaves until you have a dome shaped mound. Add a layer of light sticks on top of this so that your insulation will not blow away and then cover the floor of your shelter with more debris. Now your shelter is ready to keep you warm and safe. Add a colourful flag to your shelter so that your parents will be able to find you at suppertime!

Tip: To practise, build a debris shelter for your favorite stuffy before you build one big enough for you.

