

The Art of Sleeping Outdoors

For Vitality, Health and Freedom



Complete natural fiber backpacking gear.

Staying with some newly made friends who offered me the choice of several rooms in their house or camper....I asked if I could sleep in their yard...which was a beautiful place outside a small town called Erin Tennessee. I consider the outside my favorite room in the house. Even though their playful dog was going to sleep on top of me, and I found out, chew a hole in my sweater, I was still happy. How did I learn to love sleeping outdoors?

When I was 15 I started sleeping outside on the lawn of the apartment complex where I lived. It was brave of me to sleep in public, dragging pad and sleeping bag out to the lawn of the apartment complex where dozens of neighbors' windows looked out. It was worth it... I slept much better and felt much more awake and alert when I woke up. I have continued to perfect outdoor

sleeping and have developed a style called Natural Camping that optimizes the conditions of rejuvenation. This is a distinct style of experiencing the outdoors without excess gear and ambition. Think barefoot walking, forest bathing, cold water plunging, circadian rhythms and Earthing.

It would take dozens of scientists and several decades later for the Rewilding and Paleo movement to verify what a few others and I instinctually discovered. Why does sleeping outdoors work?

What lead up to it?

The event that lead me to discover outdoor sleeping as a teenager was a book about Native American ways. Walking and sleeping on the earth were two important factors that gave them vitality and power.

I was soon also exploring other wild places by foot and bicycle. I would take off across the Kansas countryside and find places away from houses and people. The key to my new found freedom was the ability to sleep outdoors.

Sleeping outside to me wasn't so much about sleeping as it was about being one with the night and all the things that happen such as the stars and planets, the clouds, wind, fog or rain or whatever wants to happen. It was about being with the living Mother Earth, spending time without the walls and roofs.

Benefits of Sleeping Outdoors

1. Earthing (Grounding and Schumann's Frequency) resets our circadian clock
2. Away from indoor electrical wiring which prevents us from experiencing the relaxing Schumann's Frequency (or the heartbeat of Mother Earth).
3. Negative Ions from moisture in the air, which gives us, even more grounding.
4. Fresh air (increased oxygen and other gases)
5. Away from every day toxic building materials and furniture which off-gas endocrine-disrupting pollutants.

6. Hard surface which allows constant sublexion of spine in conjunction with the breathing process. ([See Sweet Dreams on a Hard Surface](#))
7. Cooler temperatures which gives a relaxation effect from Cold Thermogenesis.
8. Feeling of oneness with the universe because we are connecting with our source.
9. Attunement to the moon and season cycles
10. The Primal Experience of living with almost nothing

10 Steps to Sleeping Outside Naturally

1 — Location

Find a good place. If you have a private backyard, deck or porch you are ahead of most of us. Just pay attention to any hazards such as power lines, transformers, or air conditioners creating Electromagnetic Fields. This will destroy the Earthing effects you are aiming at. When camping, I try to find spots by creeks or waterfalls when possible. For practicality you can sometimes make your bedroom open to the outside or turn a porch into a bedroom. Choosing a backcountry campsite is an art in itself. There are spots that are conducive to good sleep and others that can make sleep difficult. Geopathic Stress lines can wreck havoc on sleep. Stay tuned for a detailed post on this.

Widow Makers

When selecting a sleep spot, look up to see if there are any broken limbs or trees leaning towards the spot. These are called Widow Makers. A big wind can topple them down. Avoid these spots

Inclined Surface:

It is actually beneficial to sleep on a slight incline with the head facing the uphill side. This way of sleeping actually reduces heart rate and increases circulation, both, which improve sleep. Up to about 11 degrees is a good slope. If too steep it can interrupt sleep. This means about one to six inches gain between the bottom and the top. It takes a little practice getting used to. It's a good idea to

create this slope at home on your own bed so you will be accustomed to it when adventuring outdoors.

Water Drainage:

Observe the area and see if you can see what would happen in a rain. Low lying spots can become puddles and ponds. Canyon country of course, arroyos can fill up and flood from storms many miles away even if you have no idea it is raining there. Tiny arroyos exist in other places too...meaning, a dry stream or creek bed which only flows when it rains. The ideal camping spot is a piece of ground sitting slightly above the ground surrounding it. Many times one cannot completely avoid rainwater running down a slope onto your tent floor. So no matter what you need to be prepared for rain and drainage with proper gear and proper use of your gear. Read more on this below.

Air Circulation:

Closed in areas with lots of undergrowth hinder air circulation. Prairies and deserts there is usually no problem here, but in a forest you want to look for areas with tall trees and not a lot of undergrowth. Stagnant air creates microclimates that foster mold. The most vitality is from the fresh air continuously circulating into the area. The most auspicious place for air quality is next to moving streams.

Wilderness Etiquette, Privacy and Safety:

As much as possible you want to be in a place where no one knows your there. Making camp at least 200 feet from a trail is the proper etiquette for Leave No Trace Camping. It is considerate of everyone to keep as low profile as you can and let everyone experience the wilderness and solitude they came to get. It is also good etiquette to keep contact and conversation with strangers to a minimum for the same reasons. Stealth Camping is setting up in as minimal a way as you can away from the established campsites. However there are some public places, which require you stay in designated campsites and use only existing fire rings. Still, you can us a lot of these techniques in those places too.

2 – Dew and Frost

Some of the best night sky viewing is in open meadows and prairie. However these are the places you are likely to encounter dew. Just beware as this can lead to a bad night as you struggle to adjust to the changing conditions, which ultimately might leave you drenched and cold. The remedy to this is to use wool bedding instead of cotton, down or synthetic. I spent decades struggling with this until I discovered wool. There is nothing else as powerful for wicking moisture and keeping you dry. Even if the outside is drenched, the inside stays perfectly dry. With wool you can wake up with no idea the area is covered in a dense fog or dew until you get out of your sleeping bag.

3 – Rain protection

My favorite shelter is a Rain Tarp, which weighs one pound (silnylon) or two pounds (rip stop nylon), fits two people plus gear, and allows air circulation from all directions. You will also need a ground cloth under this as well as a closed cell insulated foam-sleeping pad.

In good weather the open sky is the ultimate. However it is not totally required, as most people feel more protected in a tent. The best all-round alternative is a tarp, which allows fresh air but protects from the rain. There is an amazingly simple tarp system available, which can be set up in five minutes anywhere and only weighs about two pounds and fits two people including gear. Click here for a [demo of the Ray Way Tarp system](#).

For non-backpacking camping, the ultimate tent is canvas, which protects from wind and rain but simultaneously lets air pass through it. In fact sleeping in canvas is almost as good as sleeping under the open sky. It keeps the wind out, the heat from your body in, and also brings in fresh air as if there is an open window. Lucky Sheep™ offers a 2 person canvas pyramid tent here <https://www.woolsleepingbag.com/product/canvas-tipi-tent/>

See my epic [Minimalism to the Extreme](#), which chronicles my experiment with tipi living.

4—Learn how to relax on a hard surface

My groundbreaking article [Sweet Dream's on a Hard Surface: The Ergonomics of Sleep](#), lays out in detail the advantages to a firm surface. As we sleep on a firm surface we increase air capacity, deeper breathing, deeper sleep, and also our spines get an all night spinal adjustment as natural breathing activity gently sublexes the vertebrae. If you create your indoor sleeping environment to be similar to what our ancestors enjoyed using natural materials without a mattress but simple padding instead, you will train your body to be familiar with the minimalist sleeping surface you find when camping. Some people find hammocks to be useful but my opinion is they are confining us and not allowing the advantages found on the hard surface. However if you find they work, go for it! For most camping I use a simple closed-cell foam pad. For a more permanent outdoor sleeping environment I use a slatted wooden frame with a wool felt sleeping pad on the surface. See the [Lucky Sheep™ Sleeping Felt](#).

5—Use your indoor environment to train for the outdoors.

If this is possible where you live, try keeping your home cold in winter and windows open for fresh air to the degree that it makes sense. Some people keep a bedroom with open windows but heat the rest of the house. Some houses are even built with doors which can be opened to the outside. Some people set up a tent or tarp in their backyard. Pop-up travel trailers such as the Sylvan Sport can be used at home when not on the road. Or consider putting up a tipi in your backyard!

6—Things that go bump in the night.

This is basically our fear of animals and even of the dark or that sense that something might get us. This is also related to the basic fear of the dark. This primal instinct has been a part of our species evolution and there are precautions to be such as when in bear country. Dealing with bears involves the practice of tying all food and dishes 10 feet off the ground before leaving camp or going to bed. If in the Eastern US that is sufficient. In grizzly country that is a whole other story for another blog post.

This is where the WILD enters your REWILDING lifestyle. This is the wilderness and we are re-establishing a relationship with it. There are bears and other critters out there who can harm us and we need to be prepared by knowing what these are and how to avoid confrontation.

However, the majority of situations do not pose a serious threat and people have co-existed with wildlife since the dawn of humanity. Most of these fears are like the fear of the dark or the fear of being alone.... mere fears.

The psychological aspect of fears is where the sole meets the ground. There is only one way to cure oneself of these fears and that is by facing them, challenging them, and finding that they are not a problem. All of us outdoor veterans have gone through this process and many a campfire circle is spent relating our war stories. At first every little twig snapping is cause for alarm. Then you realize you are out here living with all these creatures AND IT IS OKAY. You are out on the living earth sharing it with all the other animals and insects and creating a relationship with nature which before was cut off behind closed doors.

When I first slept in a wild area without a tent I spent most of the night unable to sleep. I felt so exposed and vulnerable and not safe. But that one night proved to me nothing was going to happen. That's about what it takes for most of us. I have spent so much time outdoors I have learned how to relax and feel protected in nature. Some people put up a protective shield or bubble and set the intention that nothing will enter. Use whatever tools work for you! Again...this is exactly why we are doing this. Because for generations humans have had a fear of nature and have launched an all out war to dominate her. And now we are discovering we want to reconnect.

7 — Insects.

This is perhaps the biggest deterrent to sleeping outside. Even the Native Americans had to deal with them by rubbing mud on their skin. In places with mosquitoes, no-see-ums, and other bity things it is necessary to use mosquitoes netting or protective clothing.

There are herbal insect repellants such as citronella and lemongrass essential oils.

Some people swear by tobacco...that is having an open can of it at camp. In many situations crawling inside the sleeping bag so your head is covered is the easiest remedy. However, this can only be done in a wool blanket or sleeping bag as synthetic will become wet from your breathing.

Avoid toxic endocrine disrupting chemical bug repellants in sprays, lotions and clothing. Why would you want to poison yourself and contradict the vitality and health reasons for being outside in the first place?

8 — Set your circadian rhythms before you leave

This will happen naturally when camping for a few days--and is in fact a big reason people go out in the first place--but you can get a head start by making your whole lifestyle create optimum sleeping conditions. There are several ways to do this and my other course *At Ease in the Cold* spells this out in detail.

1. Avoid blue light at night by using Blue Blocker glasses or orange light bulbs at night.
2. Go to bed early and keep a regular sleep schedule,
3. Eat a high fat, moderate protein diet with foods grown in season in your climate latitude. (See our other blog www.paleoalltheway.com for recipes)
4. Use Cold Thermogenesis to cold condition your body. This is a process of exposing your body to cold water or air in incrementally increasing doses.
5. Get sunlight during the day especially first thing in the morning
6. Get grounding or barefoot walking, and avoid Non Native Electromagnetic Fields when possible. Turn off the circuit to your bedroom, don't use a cell phone near your ear, and find EMF protection devices if possible such as Orgonite and the Quantum Calming Mat.
7. Get movement during the day (N.E.A.T. = non-exercise activity thermogenesis) by turning your office environment

into one that is movement friendly. ([See our Barefoot Office Kits at Footloose and Chairfree](#))

9--Biohacking for Noise and Light

You can't predict what noises will happen outside. Some nights can be so quiet you could hear a pine needle drop; other nights can have ferocious winds and pelting rain. The best bio-hack is to wear silicon earplugs. Also the light even from the stars and moon can hamper sleep. The best bio-hack for light is to place a piece of extra clothing or a [Lucky Sheep Merino Bandana](#) over your eyes.

10. My own checklist of outdoor sleeping gear.

1. Ground Cloth, which is a piece of urethane-coated rip, stops nylon (one of the places you need plastic).
2. Sleeping Pad (Closed cell foam for backpacking. For non-backpacking, use a Lucky Sheep Sleeping Felt on top of the foam).
3. Lucky Sheep Wool Sleeping Bag.
4. Tarp or Tent
5. Pillow (Can stuff your extra clothing into the all-cotton Lucky Sheep® stuff sack or use our cool Camp Pillow).
6. Bed clothing (base layer) from merino wool.
7. Get a flashlight that has a red setting so you don't ruin your night vision and circadian clock. I have a Black Diamond brand and love it.

Conclusion

I have actually met people who have never slept outdoors. I have also had people react to my outdoor sleeping practice with fear and concern. Some with open envy who are the wannabes saying, "I wish I could do that". The thing is you CAN do that and it is mostly a matter of breaking down the psychological and logistical obstacles. The experience of sleeping outdoors eradicates our fear and separation from nature. It is everyone's birthright and it is as natural as walking. There are many hiking groups on Meetup that welcome newcomers.

I am so happy outside it gives me joy and vitality not paralleled by anything else. The ultimate gift is to smell the sweetest air that enlivens, uplifts and fills my senses and spirit. You too can have this experience and if you already have, you can learn to make it more accessible and enjoyable with this Guide to Sleeping Outside.

I've had people tell me, "I feel sorry for you out there all alone in the cold."

My reply is, "For one thing I'm not alone. I am with the entire Universe. I'm with the dew and the process of dew forming. I'm with the frost painting a layer on the outside of my sleeping bag as I watch the moon and stars sail across the sky, and feel the air kissing my nostrils and lungs and showing me how amazingly self-reliant I am. This also reminds me of there is nothing to fear and so I feel at ease and at home anywhere. For another thing, I feel sorry for you in there confined to the house in the heat keeping you from feeling your ultimate aliveness and vitality, and putting you under the illusion that your need all this 'stuff' to make you secure."

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