



# How to Build a Log Raft

Two Methods: [Basic log raft](#) [Emergency raft for up to 3 persons](#)

If you want to fulfill that Huckleberry Finn fantasy adventure of camping on a log raft, here is a good way to build a simple log raft.

Method  
1

## Basic log raft

- 1 Collect 4 to 10 logs.** Lay them gently into the shallow water near shore that is deep enough for the logs to float. Choose equal sized logs because they fit better (be careful not to lay the logs into a rough sea because they might float away!).
- 2 Collect 6 poles that are longer than the logs.** At one end of the bunched up logs, put a pole under the logs crosswise with a matching pole above. Repeat the process, with the remaining poles, space them to the opposite end of the raft. Gently ensure that there are no big gaps between the logs or you may lose your valuable possessions while at sea.
- 3 Tie the ends of the poles together at each end to clamp the logs tightly.** Scan the island for strong vines and rope like plants which may provide you with strong fastenings.
- 4 Scan the area.** Planks, driftwood and tree bark can be laid on the top sides of the cross poles to create an elevated platform. Bark works well and floats easily but split driftwood with the smooth, round side up looks more natural furthermore, it lasts longer in harsh weather conditions.
- 5 Done.** In addition to this design, you could add a sail if you can locate any washed up sacking or old ship sails. After scanning your location, you might also find a large palm leaf which may work just as well.

Method  
2

## Emergency raft for up to 3 persons

- 1 Select the logs.** The raft for 3 people will need logs that measure around 12 feet/3.6 meters in length. The raft will need to be 6 feet/1.8 meters wide. Each log should measure around 12 to 14 inches/25-30cm in diameter. Importantly, they should match in size so as to ensure evenness across the flat area when assembled.
- 2 Place two skid logs in such a way as to slope down to the bank of the river or seashore.** If the skid logs are not even, use an axe to smooth them (remove twigs, bumps, etc.).
- 3 Cut two sets of inverted notches at each end of the logs.** These notches need to be both top and bottom of each log and they must match up in a line when the logs are pushed together.
  - The top notch rows should be offset from the bottom notch rows; have the top notch rows more to the edge and the bottom notch rows inward more but still close.
  - Small poles with straight edges can be used to make the notches; or a string pulled taut.
- 4 Make four three-sided wooden crosspieces.** These need to be approximately one foot longer than the width of the raft.
  - Drive the crosspieces through the notch sets on the underside of the raft.
  - Flip the raft over and drive the crosspieces through the top notch sets.
  - If wished, lash the overhanging areas of the crosspieces together with rope, vine, string, etc. Note that this is

not absolutely necessary, as the crosspieces will swell when they are immersed in water, which will bind the logs to the crosspieces anyway. If you do have material to lash the overhang with, it will help tighten the whole structure.

- That said, if the crosspieces appear to be too loose in the notch grooves, wedge with pieces of wood taken from a dead log. It must be dead because dead, dry wood swells on contact with water and creates the necessary tight seal.

**5 Add a deck.** Light poles can be added on top of the raft to form a deck that will keep you and your traveling companions, plus gear, drier.

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## Tips

- The raft will probably be really heavy so you should build it on logs horizontal with the beach so you can easily roll it out to the ocean.
- Steering poles are handy to have on board.
- For a decent sail, try canvas or nylon and remember to sew the edges to prevent fraying. Use a "lateen" (rather than a "square" or "cat") rig (like a Sunfish sailboat), which allows the sail to swivel with the wind, around the mast, giving you more control, but is simpler to operate. Basic plans for this can be found on most boat-building sites.
- You can mount a mast and use a tarp for a sail, but you don't get much control. Use paddles for rudders.
- If your logs are uneven, you may need to find a way to wedge the smaller-diameter ones from the bottom, so they don't float out the ends.
- Note: If you want to have more stability, stay higher above water and carry more things, build a pontoon raft, which is like a catamaran! Follow the same process as above, but make *two* narrower, higher sections. Using marine bolts, secure either

a piece of thick plywood or several planks to each log bunch.

- It is possible to make a raft big enough for a tent, a barbecue, or even a small cabin.
- When building a raft it's always good to carry extra stealing poles, and tie them to the raft itself so the poles can't float away.
- Try and add pool noodles around the corners so if it bumps into anything, it won't break. Remember, it's just wood!

## Warnings

- Log rafts are much more stable than canoes in choppy water, but they can break up. Always carry life preservers!
- Always tow an escape vessel, such as a raft or canoe.

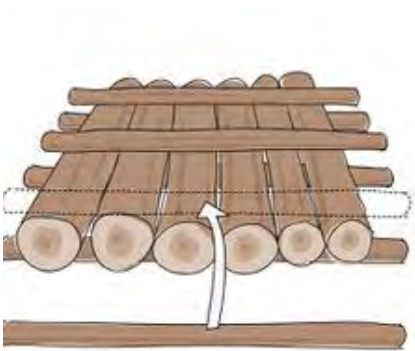
## Things You'll Need

- Logs
- Sticks
- Dry wood (dead)
- Axe
- String
- Vine, rope, etc.

## Sources and Citations

- Method 2: Paul Tawrell, *Camping and Wilderness Survival*, p. 118, (2006), ISBN 0-9740820-2-3 – research source

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