



# How to Find Water

Three Parts: [Identifying Signs of Water Nearby](#) [Accessing Trapped Water](#) [Determining the Drinkability of Water](#)

Locating water is an important skill to have if you enjoy wilderness activities such as hiking, camping, or cross-country events. Water is vital to the performance of your body. Even a single day without water can become a challenge. Dehydration can result in clouded judgement, physical weakness, vomiting, and fainting.<sup>[1]</sup> In as few as three days the body can begin to shut down, leading to death. Knowing how to find water if you become lost or separated from regular water supplies can save your life.

## Part 1

### Identifying Signs of Water Nearby

- 1 Look for areas that have green foliage.** Green areas in a desert or plains area can indicate the presence of water.<sup>[2]</sup> A line of trees or some foliage low on the ground may also hint at a creek bed or some other body of water.
- 2 Scout the terrain for low-lying areas.**<sup>[3]</sup> Some examples of these include valleys, depressions, or crevices. Water moves toward the lowest point possible, so these places are prime locations for finding a lake or stream.
  - Rainwater may collect in these areas.
  - If you are in a mountainous area, check for water at the foot of cliffs.
- 3 Detect signs of wildlife.** Circling birds can sometimes indicate a water source nearby, but you might also follow animal tracks. Water is a basic need for all animals, and the tracks you follow will likely lead you, eventually, to a watering hole.<sup>[4]</sup>
- 4 Notice the presence of insects.** Mosquitoes in particular are an indication that water is nearby, as is the presence of flies, which tend to remain about 325 feet (100 meters) from water. Generally, most insects do not stray too far from water sources.
  - Keep your eyes peeled for bees as well. Bees build hives three to five miles away from a water source.

## Part 2

### Accessing Trapped Water

- 1 Collect suitable snow or ice to make water.** If you are in an arctic area, or an area that receives snowfall, you should collect snow that has a bluish look to it. This will prevent you from consuming frozen water that has high in salt content, which could contribute to your dehydration.
  - Frozen water that has a higher concentration of salt will appear gray or opaque.
- 2 Melt the ice with a heat source and purify.** There are many ways you might melt your ice into water that will quench your thirst. In extreme situations, you may have to find a container and then cuddle it, using your body heat to melt the snow. In other cases you may be able to use a match, lighter, or other heat source. Once the snow has melted, you may purify the water using several different methods, such as:<sup>[5][6]</sup>
  - A water purifying tablet to cleanse the snow, now turned to water, for consumption.
  - A filtration device, like a water purifying straw, to drink your thawed snow.
  - Using your heat source to bring the melted snow to a boil. Allow it to boil for a least a minute to guarantee the water has been purified.

**3 Search out water in damp sand or dirt.**<sup>[7]</sup> In an arid setting, if you spot a depression or moist patch of sand behind a sand dune, in a dried out lake, a gully, or some similar feature, you should dig down in that area to search for water. If you notice water begging to puddle at the bottom of your hole, you're in luck.

**4 Locate any water-containing plants, such as barrel or saguaro cacti.**<sup>[8]</sup> It can be helpful to brush up on your knowledge of edible and poisonous plants, but this may be an unrealistic option for your situation. Instead, you seek water in vines, cacti, and roots.<sup>[9]</sup> Cut a notch in the plant and wait for liquid to seep out. In the case of cacti, break it open and suck moisture from its pulp, being careful not to eat any of the cactus, as it could make you sick.<sup>[10][11]</sup> Generally, you should avoid drinking plant sap that is:<sup>[12]</sup>

- Thick
- Colored
- Sour or bitter
- Sharp or unpleasant in odor

### Part 3

## Determining the Drinkability of Water

**1 Know the hazards of drinking unpurified water.** Drinking water that is poisonous, contaminated with parasites or bacteria, or is tainted by human waste can cause serious health complications.<sup>[13]</sup> This can be a threat to your survival in an emergency a wilderness experience. Illnesses associated with contaminated water include:<sup>[14][15]</sup>

- Dysentery
- Cholera
- Typhoid

**2 Increase your chance of survival while looking for water.** Sweat will make you dehydrate faster, so you should avoid activities that may make you sweat while looking for water. You should also:

- Stay in the shade, if possible.
- Avoid eating anything while thirsty.
- Damp your clothes in hot conditions to cool yourself in hot climates.
- Carry materials, like a plastic sheet, to make water collection devices.<sup>[16]</sup>

**3 Be prepared to purify the water you find.** You can do this simply by bringing water to a boil over a fire, though this might not always be an option. To ensure you don't end up drinking water potentially tainted with parasites or bacteria, you should consider:

- Carrying water purifying tablets.
- Purchasing a simple water filtration device, like a water purifying straw.

**4 Choose water that is clear and flowing.** Flowing water will not be stagnant, and stagnant water is an ideal breeding ground for many disease-carrying insects and parasites.<sup>[17]</sup> When deciding on whether or not a source of flowing water is safe to drink, keep in mind:

- The location of the nearest human settlement. The downstream area of rivers can easily be tainted by human activities.
- The mouth or origin of a water source will likely be safest for drinking.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Tips

- Ration existing water until drinkable water is found.
- Be sure to purify all water that is found for drinking by using purifying tablets, boiling the water, or adding a few drops of iodine.
- Eat high water-containing foods, such as berries, while looking for water. Avoid consuming water depleting foods, such as granola.

## Warnings

- Do not drink salt water.
- Do not eat snow or ice unless absolutely necessary. This will lower body temperature and complicate survival.
- Do not eat cacti pulp. Chew the pulp thoroughly, then spit it out.

## Things You'll Need

- Water purifying tablets
- Pot (optional)
- Filtration straw (optional)
- Matches

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/dehydration-adults>
2. <http://www.secretsofsurvival.com/survival/How-to-Find-Water-in-the-Wilderness.html>
3. <http://indefinitelywild.gizmodo.com/how-to-find-and-purify-drinking-water-in-the-wildernes-1580821351>

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