

Make a Survival Kit out of an Altoids Tin (and Two More Life-Saving DIY Projects)



The Pocket Kit

Fitting inside an altoids tin, this kit is easy to keep on hand at all times

This is ideal for anyone who wants to have the essential survival gear along each time they head into the field. Everything fits in the Altoids tin (above). It fulfills all the component groups (see "Make Your Own," last slide) except for shelter and protection, but add a survival blanket to your pocket and you'll be covered. **Keep clicking through the following slides for details on all of this kit's components.**



Fire and Light

From left to right: **Steel striker** with **Mini-Match magnesium fire starter**. One side of the starter is magnesium and the other is flint. You scrape shavings off the former and then light them with a spark from the latter. **Waterproof-windproof matches** with a **striker**, placed in a mini zip-seal bag, then rolled and taped. **5 Tinder-Quik fire tabs**, which light even when wet. They're great for stuffing in all the extra spaces of a survival tin to eliminate rattling. **Candle**. I cut a 1/2-inch-diameter emergency candle down to the height of the Altoids tin, so it fits in one corner. **Photon Micro-Light II**, a bright LED flashlight.



Water and Food

From left to right: **Water bag**. A Reynolds Oven Bag does the trick, cut down to fit in the tin, with a 1-quart marking as a guide for using iodine tablets. **20 Potable Aqua water purification tablets**, repackaged in a mini glass vial. **50 feet of braided fishing line** wound on a round sewing-machine bobbin. **Fishing tackle kit** in a plastic tube. Inside are assorted **hooks, swivels, and split shot**. **10 feet of 24-gauge snare wire**.



Signaling and Navigation

From left to right: **Custom-made signal mirror**. Commercial versions are all too thick to fit in this kit. I used a durable, ultrathin piece of plastic called mica (locksmiths slide this between a door and jamb to push the lock back). I glued on a piece of Mylar film, rounded the corners, and made a sighting hole. **20mm AA liquid-filled button compass**. It's the best-quality instrument that will fit in the tin.



Tools and Medical Supplies

From left to right: **Commando Wire Saw**, a small survival cable saw. **2 X-Acto knife blades**, without the handle. You should always have a real knife on your person; these blades are for backup. **Small packet of antibiotic ointment. 2 butterfly closures.**



Multipurpose

From left to right: Several yards of **nylon string**. **2 magnetized sewing needles** for sewing or making an emergency compass (floated in water on a leaf, the needle will face north). **Small piece of glue**, cut off a glue-gun stick. Small laminated card with **instructions for water purification tablets and fishing knots**. **Fresnel magnifier**. This lens can start a fire by magnifying the sun's rays to a point on your tinder, causing combustion. **Safety pin**, for repairing clothes and straps. **2 feet of aluminum foil** for making a cup, signaling, cooking fish, etc.



The Day Hunter

This kit, designed to ride on your belt, is ideal for most deer hunting trips

This holds more and larger components than the pocket kit, and you can carry it on your belt. The pouch is 6x4x2 inches, with a zippered compartment inside and another on the flap. And many of the small items are packed in a tin, which is bigger than the Altoids tin used in the Pocket Kit, measuring 4 3/8 x 3 1/4 x 11/16 inches. **Keep clicking through the following slides for details on all of this kit's components.**



Fire and Light

From left to right: **Mini-Match magnesium fire starter with steel striker. 12 waterproof-windproof matches with striker. Small disposable lighter. Tub candle (also called a tea light). 6 Tinder-Quik fire tabs. CMG Infinity LED Task Light flashlight**



Water and Food

From left to right: **24 Potable Aqua water purification tablets**, repackaged in a small glass vial. **24 P.A. Plus tablets** to neutralize the iodine taste from the above, repackaged in a glass vial. **Small water bag** as in the pocket kit but not cut down. **50 feet of 20-pound braided fishing line**. **Fishing tackle kit** in a tube containing **12 assorted hooks, 6 swivels, 6 split shot**, and a **small jig or lure**. **20 feet of 24-gauge snare wire**.



Signaling, Navigation, and Tools

From left to right: **StarFlash signal mirror** by Survival Inc. It floats and is enclosed in an unbreakable Lexan polycarbonate. Liquid-filled, **fixed-dial compass** by Brunton. Partially serrated **Spyderco folding wallet knife** (chosen for size and shape of kit). **Survival cable saw**. **2 X-Acto knife blades**.



Medical and Multipurpose

From left to right: **2 butterfly closures**. **Small packet of antibiotic ointment**. **Thread** for making repairs on clothing. **2 magnetized sewing needles**. **Fresnel magnifier**. **Tick tweezers**. **Small golf pencil**. **3 sheets waterproof paper** (for leaving notes). **Laminated instructions for water purification tablets and fishing knots**. **6 safety pins**. **2 feet of heavy-duty aluminum foil**.



The Wilderness Hunter

This fanny pack could save your life on extended hunts in remote country

A medium fanny pack carries larger components and includes all the basic groups. It also lets you carry 32 ounces of water. I picked this particular model because it holds a bottle on each end, which helps balance the weight. **Keep clicking through the following slides for details on all of this kit's components.**



Fire and Light

From left to right: **Princeton Tec Attitude flashlight** with 3 ultrabright LEDs. **25 waterproof-windproof matches** in a waterproof vial. **Doan magnesium fire starter** (it's much larger than the one described in the previous kits but easier to use). **Pink Lady candle** (sold at most camping stores). **Waterproof match case** filled with **cotton balls (not shown) soaked with petroleum jelly** for use as tinder. They light with one spark. **2 small green Cyalume light sticks**.



Shelter, Personal Protection, and Medical Supplies

From left to right: Heavy-duty all-weather **space blanket**. With grommets around the outside, it can be used as an emergency tarp. **Emergency poncho**. Pack of **antibacterial wipes**. 40-foot hank of **parachute (a.k.a. 550) cord**. This has the greatest utility for survival purposes. Just 1/8 inch in diameter, it is a nylon shroud with seven inner nylon lines. These strong lines can be separated and used for building shelter, for making nets and snares, as fishing line, etc. Forty feet provides you with 280 feet of the inner lines plus the shroud. **Waterproof pouch** with **1 extra pair of socks** and **1 extra pair of underwear**. **Small medical kit**. I started with a 7x4-inch first-aid pouch from EMS and organized the contents in zip-seal bags, putting bandages and wound-management items in one packet, lip balm and medicine in another.



Water and Food

From left to right: **2 full 16-ounce Nalgene water bottles** (not shown). **Frontier water filter**, a small straw-type filter that lets you drink directly from a stream or lake. **Titanium Snow Peak Sierra cup** with folding handles. **In the Tin:** bottle of **50 Potable Aqua water purification tablets** and **fishing tackle kit with braided line**, (I packaged these components together they don't find their way to the bottom of the bag). **1 MRE entrée**. **3 granola bars**, **2 tea bags**, **4 sugar packets**, and **2 bouillon packets** (in zip-seal bag).



Signaling, Navigation, and Tools

From left to right: **StarFlash signal mirror**. **Skyblazer signal whistle**. **U-Dig-It folding trowel**. **Suunto Woodsman A-30-L orienteering compass** (this type of compass is for navigating with a map). **SOG SEAL Revolver knife**. It has a large clip-point blade on one end and a saw on the other. This is not a folder but a fixed-blade knife in which the handle covers the end not being used.



Multipurpose

From left to right: Various sizes of **zip-seal bags**. **2 garbage bags**. **Fresnel magnifier**. **Bandanna**, which can be used to prefilter water, as a pot holder, or even as a bandanna. Several feet of **heavy-duty aluminum foil**. **1 travel roll of toilet paper**. **Magnetized sewing needles**. **Several safety pins**.



Make Your Own: Three Steps to a Life-Saving Kit

1. **Think about skills**
Focus not on the components but on the tasks you'll want them to perform. In a survival situation, you'll need to do most of the following: build a fire, construct a shelter, get and purify drinking water, gather food, signal for help, navigate back to civilization, and administer basic first aid. Once you know what types of functions you must be prepared to carry out, you can select the proper items.
2. **Pick your tools**
Choose at least one component from each of the groups below. Some items can meet the requirements of more than one. Fine-tune your selection to match your location or the season, and remember that you may want more

than one item from certain categories. For example, I always bring at least three ways to start a fire.

Fire and Light: matches, disposable lighter, flint and striker, magnesium fire starter, tinder, candle, and a magnifying lens. For the latter: flashlight, headlamp, and chemical light sticks.

Shelter and Personal Protection: survival blanket, poncho and rain gear, tarp, tube tent, parachute cord, headnet, hat, extra clothes, sunglasses, sunscreen, lip balm, and bug repellent.

Water and Food: basic needs are water purification tablets or a filter, and a water container. Add snare wire and fishing kits for food collection, plus emergency rations, a small cup or pot, and a small stove.

Signaling: signal mirror, whistle, smoke signals, flares, dye markers, and emergency strobe.

Navigation: compass, maps, and GPS unit.

Knives and Tools: knives, saw, trowel, and shovel.

Medical: first-aid supplies for wound management, like bandages and first-aid ointment. Plus antibiotics, pain medicine, and personal medications.

Multipurpose: aluminum foil, wire, duct tape, large garbage bags, bandanna, surgical tubing, zip-seal bags, dental floss, sewing thread and needles, glue stick, and safety pins can all fill more than one function.

Miscellaneous items include a survival manual, knife sharpener, thermometer, pencil and paper, toilet paper, and a cellphone.

3. **Build your kit**

Determine what size kit you want to carry, then decide on what you'll pack everything into. This can be a tin, a waterproof container, or a soft case such as a belt pouch, waist pack, or backpack. For mini kits, I usually prefer a tin, like the kind that Altoids come in; since you don't have room for a cup, you can use it to boil water. To make a mini kit, select the smallest components from each group. Be innovative when choosing items. Repackage them compactly if necessary, and whenever possible, select things that can perform more than one function.

You can buy most of the items featured in this article from sporting-goods stores, hardware stores, Army surplus stores, and the following sources:

Adventure Medical Kits, 800-324-3517; adventuremedicalkits.com

Brunton, 307-856-6559; brunton.com

Campmor, 888-226-7667; www.campmor.com

Eastern Mountain Sports, 888-463-6367; ems.com

Nalgene Outdoor Products, 800-625-4327; www.nalgene-outdoor.com

Snow Peak USA, 503-697-3330; www.snowpeak.com

SOG Specialty Knives and Tools, 425-771-6230;