

# Three Winter Survival Shelters

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A look at a few of the basic winter wilderness survival shelters that skiers, hikers and others should be familiar with.  
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Anyone who ventures out into the wilderness in the colder months of the year might want to know how to construct a few basic winter survival shelters. We can probably rule out the most famous of these, the igloo. It's difficult and time consuming to build, especially if you haven't done it before. It also requires certain snow conditions. That leaves at least three easier shelters, as described here.

## The Tree Pit Shelter

{bot\_wrgoogle}This is perhaps the easiest of all the survival shelters, because it is essentially already made for you. The way the snow falls in deep forests, there is often a "hole" around the base of evergreen trees. The snow here is shallower, and there may even be bare ground at times. The surrounding deeper snow creates a circular wall around this, which blocks the wind.

Just climb down in if you are caught out in a blizzard. If you have more time, you can modify these to better protect yourself from the elements. To start with, always try to stay off the snow or cold ground in the bottom. You can do this using a layer of dry grass, tips from evergreen branches, or whatever else is available. Make this thick enough to insulate you from the cold below, and large enough to curl up on to sleep.

You can also create more of a "roof" above your tree pit, using whatever branches you can break off and collect by hand. This will further block the wind and snow. If you enclose the space well enough and it is small, you might even be able to retain enough of your body heat to have a shelter that is a few degrees warmer than the outside air. A fire in one of these is a bad idea.

## The Snow Cave

A snow cave is carved out of a large drift on the side of a hill, assuming the snow is deep enough. After digging into the snow a way to create an entrance, you'll want to carve out a sleeping shelf higher up. This allows the colder air to settle below you near the entryway.

Again it is important to insulate yourself from the cold snow with a layer of soft evergreen branches or a sleeping pad if you have one, or anything else that works. You can raise the temperature a few degrees above that of the outside air with your body heat alone if the cave is small. You also can use a candle for heat. If you do that, poke a hole through the ceiling to the outside, for ventilation.

## The Snow Trench

This is one of the simplest of winter survival shelters, much easier to construct than either an igloo or a snow cave. You essentially just dig out or kick out a trench in the snow that is big enough to lay down in, and then make a roof of some sort. There are several ways you can do the latter.

If you have a poncho or tarp or even the remains of a tent you can use that as a roof. Prop it up with a few sticks to give yourself room to sit up (at least at one end). You can use tree branches for a roof as well. Evergreen boughs work best, with perhaps a few longer sticks as a framework. Leave a way to crawl into the shelter, of course, and perhaps a way to close the entrance afterwards.

If there are no other materials available, the snow itself can often be used. Look for areas where it is crusty. Using your feet, kick out rectangular pieces of the hard surface snow to see if they hold together. If so, they can be propped up to lean against each other like an A-frame roof over the trench. This is not the most comfortable of the winter survival

shelters, but it can usually be built very quickly.

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