

# Get Wild: What to have in your pack for a day hike

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**Ken Harper**  
**Get Wild**



Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance volunteer wilderness ranger Emily Elder shows off her pack while hiking the Pitkin Lake Trail on Tuesday, June 15.  
*Photo from Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance*

What to bring on a day hike in our local wilderness areas might seem obvious to people living in the mountains, but as a volunteer wilderness ranger for Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, I am amazed at the number of people who are underprepared – including locals and visitors.

So, what to bring? First and foremost is enough water. The recommended amount is 1/2 to 1 liter of water for every hour that you will be hiking. A lot of the trails in our local mountains are steeper than people realize, and most hikers do not bring enough water.

Next is a good first-aid kit with a Swiss army-type knife. Many hikers have had to abort a hike due to a sprain, blister or cut. A well-stocked first-aid kit – available for under \$25 – can help in these situations.

Good footwear is essential. Light tennis shoes or sandals are insufficient for our trails, which are often rocky, muddy or snowy with stream crossings. You need sturdy boots. Don't be that hiker who creates social trails around the difficult areas on the main trail or requires rescue due to inadequate footwear.

Sunscreen is a must. Most hikers, even locals, don't realize the power of the sun at altitude. For every 1,000 feet in elevation gain, the UV rays are about 4% more intense. A wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses are recommended.

Though most trails are somewhat marked, it's possible to become lost. A good trail map is essential, and it's useful to determine your location and the distance to your destination. I use the compass app on my phone, which provides GPS coordinates and elevation. Combined with a map, it helps determine location.

Always have a rain jacket and an extra layer, even if it looks like a bluebird day. Storms in the mountains can roll into the area in a matter of minutes and catch people by surprise. Becoming wet and cold can quickly lead to hypothermia, which can be deadly. For storm detection, I have both a radar and lightning app on my cellphone. Many of our trails are within cell service at times, and these apps can be useful in detecting an oncoming storm.

Hiking at altitude uses up energy, so bring plenty of food. Energy bars, dried fruit and trail mix are good choices along with some sugar candy in case someone in your party or another hiker you encounter is bonking, or experiencing exhaustion.




Ken Harper

One item I carry that is not in most people's packs is a human waste bag. You never know when you might have to poop. With trails becoming so crowded these days, "pack it in, pack it out" is a necessary principle. No one wants to see toilet paper and other litter along the trail. Human and dog waste is a threat to wildlife and water quality. I also carry a couple of doggy bags, so I can carry out others' litter.

Don't forget bug spray, a headlamp, a space blanket and a whistle for emergencies. I also take hiking poles<sup>6</sup> which take a lot of strain off knees and provide a fuller body workout.

If your pack has all these items in it, the odds of a successful hike are much greater. And if you do get into trouble, be sure to call for help sooner than later.

Have a wonderful summer hiking in our beautiful wilderness!

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Ken Harper is a volunteer wilderness ranger for Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit [EagleSummitWilderness.org](https://EagleSummitWilderness.org).

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