

How To Choose Hiking Boots



How to Choose the Right Hiking Shoe

With so many different types of hiking shoes and boots out there, you may be overwhelmed thinking about where to begin in selecting the right one for you. In this article, we hope to help you narrow down the process.

First, think about the type of hike you're going to be doing – is it going to be a short day hike on well-worn trails, or a multi-day backpacking trip over rough terrain? Will it be hot and dry, or will you encounter some rain or wet conditions?

Waterproof or ventilated? If you're planning on hiking in dry, hot conditions, a ventilated shoe or boot is a great option. Vented shoes allow your feet to breathe. On the other hand, if your trip takes you through mud, water, or snow, consider going waterproof. Waterproof shoes and boots will be slightly heavier but will block moisture, and because the shoes are still breathable any water vapor you produce as sweat will be wicked away. Waterproof shoes have a tag or stamp on the side to indicate the type of waterproofing, like Gore-Tex, eVent, or another proprietary membrane.

What's in a boot or shoe? There are four main components – the upper, midsole, internal support, and outsole. The upper is composed of synthetic textile and leather. If it's waterproof, it has a membrane that wraps around the inside. The midsole lies just below the upper and provides cushioning and helps make a boot stiff. Midsoles are primarily made of EVA or polyurethane. A shoe or boot may have additional internal support, which are shanks or plates that lie between the midsole and outsole to add load-bearing stiffness to the midsole. Finally, the outsole, made of rubber and containing bumps or lugs, provides traction. Deeper lugs provide more traction while wider-spaced lugs are designed to shed mud. Below, we'll take a look at some options.

Low hiker

Low hikers, also called hiking shoes, are lighter and more flexible than traditional boots. Some look a bit like trail running shoes and some are low-cut versions of hiking

How To Choose Hiking Boots



boots. You may want to consider hiking shoes if you'll stick to well-defined trails and not carry a lot of weight. Shoes are constructed of synthetic materials and sued and leather and don't provide as much support as traditional boots, though allow for faster hiking.

Hiking Boots

Hiking boots are best for those going out on longer excursions on rougher terrain. They are also a good option for people who easily roll their ankles. Boots have much of the same material as low hikers, though generally in different proportions; boots have less synthetic material and a greater amount of more durable materials. Many hiking boots have toe bumpers and also offer better underfoot protection than low hikers.

Backpacking Boots

These boots are best-suited for hikers headed out on rough terrain and carrying a heavy load. They are more durable than hiking boots and have stiffer midsoles than other boots to support your knees and ankles while carrying additional weight. They will need some breaking in prior to your long hike, so it's best to start by wearing them around the house and then on several shorter jaunts before your trip.

Fitting the Boot

Hiking shoes and boots should fit snugly but not be tight. When wearing the boot, you should be able to wiggle your toes but not feel like you're swimming inside. There shouldn't be rubbing or hot spots; if this is the case, it may be the wrong boot for your foot. A quick test – move your toes to the very front of the boot – you should be able to reach a finger down the back of the boot. If you can't, it's too small. Take your time and walk around the store and up and down stairs if possible. If you can find a ramp to "stomp" on, do that too – if your toes are touching the front of the shoes, either the shoe is too small, just not a good fit for you, or your laces need to be tied tighter. When you do try them on, bring along the socks you plan to wear while hiking, along with orthotics, if you have them. If possible, go toward the end of day when your feet are naturally a bit swollen, much like they will be on a hike, to get a truer fit.