

Buying a Backpack

External vs. internal frame backpacks:

When you start to do backpacking trips, even into a hut, it's time to find a backpack with a hipbelt. If you aren't ready to buy one, the troop has several backpacks to lend out, and packs can be rented from EMS and REI. If you are ready to buy, read on:

Backpacks have either an "external frame" (where the frame, usually aluminum, is visible) or an "internal frame" (where the frame is built into the pack). External frame packs are increasingly being supplanted by internal frame packs. While we used to recommend external frame packs for scouts, now it's a toss-up.

External frame packs are somewhat easier to adjust to a growing body, large in capacity, and easy to access due to outside pockets. Their main disadvantage is they are not always comfortable, and the frame can get in the way when scootching over boulders or down steep trails. In the past, internal frame packs have tended to be more expensive, had less volume, and have been less accessible and less adjustable for growing bodies. However, there is now at least one internal frame pack that has overcome most of these restrictions. Internal packs tend to be more comfortable, and this is what most adults now buy unless they are hauling extremely heavy or unwieldy loads.

External frame choices:

There are several external frame models on the market. Whether to get a medium or large frame depends on the size of your child. If at all possible, go large. Look at packs online and then pick out one or two to try at stores before purchasing. At the store load up the pack with weight (25-30 lb. - they will have bags of sand or similar), and fit the pack with store help. Make sure the weight of the pack can rest entirely on the hips with just a t-shirt on by cinching up the hip belt strap, and that the frame is big enough for several years of growth (distance between hip belt and shoulder strap must be expandable).

To try on external frame packs, the Scout Store probably has the best selection. Campmor mail order has good prices. Kelty is one reasonably priced, reputable brand. The Kelty Yukon 2900 with telescoping frame is probably a good bet, \$100 at Scout store, \$80 at Campmor. Youth and adult versions. Avoid cheaper plastic external frames, such as those made by Outdoor Products, unless you just plan to use it for short trips for a year or two (OK for first year scouts who aren't passionate about hiking and backpacking).

Internal frame choices:

One internal frame pack in particular stands out for younger scouts: the Kelty Coyote 4500 or 4750. It is comfortable, adjustable for growth up to about 5'8", can take small or big loads, has functional lash points, and is reasonably priced. Perhaps best of all it has 4 large outside pockets that improve accessibility. This is a very versatile pack, not too heavy or gimmicky, and well made. Chris Waters has been using his for 2 years and swears by it – he won't hike in anything else. Find last year's 4500 model now at Sierra Trading Post for \$90, and the 4750 at the Scout store for \$130. The Kelty Red Cloud 5000 or 5600 are also worth looking at, though I haven't seen these up close. There are of course hundreds of packs out there to choose from.

When you buy a pack also buy 1- 2 pairs of 1" nylon straps with fastex buckles (36-48" length). These straps make it easy to securely attach pads, tents, snowshoes, and other bulky gear. About \$2.00 each.

Buying a Sleeping Bag

As Gini writes in the introduction to gear, a sleeping bag is something to invest in – you'll have it for a long time. Buy a warmer adult-sized 3-season mummy bag with quality synthetic insulation (Delta, Polarguard, Holofil or similar. Not down!) which is rated to at least 20 deg. or less. The insulation will lose its loft (and thus warmth) over time – inevitable. You can always unzip the bag in summer if it's hot. A draft tube along the zipper, and a way of making a hood at the top with a drawstring are must-haves. A baffle ringing the neck/shoulder area is a nice extra, but not common. The bag should weigh between 3 - 4.25 pounds and should compress down to backpacking dimensions. A stuff bag with compression straps helps. Look for sales and at outlets. Some mummies are tighter widthwise than others, but for most scouts this isn't a problem. The scout should be comfortable in the bag with a full set of winter clothes on. Expect to pay \$100-120 on sale for a good one. Less if you are lucky.