

Building a Forest Debris Hut

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A simple weatherproof shelter called a **debris hut** or **three-sided lean-to** can be constructed out of natural materials found in the forest without the need for special tools or equipment. Such a survival structure will keep a lost person warm and dry for a long time and protect from hypothermia or, building one can simply be a fun activity for kids in a wooded backyard or a nearby woodlot.



Step 1 Choose a wooded location on high and dry ground free from thickets, brambles and poison ivy.

Step 2 Find a small, stout or medium sized tree, a boulder or a large fallen tree trunk or stump to support the shelter. Avoid very tall trees since they are more likely to attract lightning in a storm. Here, this small dogwood works well.



Step 3 The ridgepole is the debris hut's backbone and main support. It should be a straight, sturdy stick and it should be a little longer than body length of the person who will use the shelter.



Step 4 Lean the ridgepole on the supporting tree about two feet from the ground.

Step 5 Next, Build a frame by leaning tent pole-sized sticks on both sides of the ridgepole. Space each stick about 10-12 in. apart.



Step 6 Search the forest for fallen branches and weave them into the framework of the debris hut. Cover the frame completely. The more branched and twisty the branches are, the better they will work to fill the shelter's frame. Be careful that all the branches are positioned outside the frame and that nothing protrudes into the shelter's interior.



Step 7 Now it's time to put the "debris" into the debris hut. Collect big handfuls of fallen leaves from the ground and stuff them in between the twisty branches that cover the frame. Stuff enough leaves onto the shelter so that no daylight is visible while looking in through the structure's entrance. When all the daylight is blocked out, throw another layer of leaves on top of the shelter and let them run down the sides.



Step 8 Leaves are very good weatherproof insulators but, not if they all blow away in a storm. Add another layer of sticks to pin everything together.



Step 9 A thick layer of dry leaves on the inside will add additional insulation and keep the shelter's occupant off the cold moist ground. It's not the Hyatt, Hilton or Holiday Inn but it will keep a lost individual warm and dry in the stormiest weather for a long time. Please notice that the debris hut is constructed completely out of fallen materials and that it is not necessary to destroy living plants to build this structure. It would also be a good idea to check your body for ticks after engaging in this activity.

