

How To Shit In The Woods An Environmentally Sound Approach To A Lost Art

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The art of relieving oneself in nature, once a commonplace skill, has become somewhat lost in our modern, convenience-driven world. However, with the increasing popularity of hiking, backpacking, and wilderness exploration, understanding how to defecate in the woods responsibly is more important than ever. This guide explores environmentally sound techniques for human waste disposal in the wilderness, covering everything from choosing the right location to proper hygiene and minimizing your impact on the delicate ecosystems we enjoy. We'll cover topics like **Leave No Trace principles**, **cathole digging techniques**, and **waste disposal bags** for different situations.

The Benefits of Responsible Wilderness Waste Disposal

Practicing responsible waste disposal in the outdoors offers numerous benefits beyond simply avoiding unpleasant encounters. It protects the environment, preserves the natural beauty of wild areas, and ensures the continued enjoyment of these spaces for future generations. Here are some key advantages:

- **Protecting Water Sources:** Improperly disposed human waste can contaminate water sources, potentially leading to the spread of harmful bacteria and diseases. Proper burying significantly reduces this risk.
- **Preserving Wildlife Habitats:** Waste left on the surface attracts animals, disrupting their natural behavior and potentially exposing them to disease. Proper burial minimizes this impact.
- **Maintaining Trail Aesthetics:** Leaving waste visible detracts from the enjoyment of the natural environment for other hikers and visitors. Responsible disposal keeps trails clean and appealing.

- **Minimizing Odor and Insect Attraction:** Properly buried waste minimizes odor and reduces the attraction of insects, improving the overall experience for everyone.
- **Upholding Leave No Trace Ethics:** Responsible wilderness waste disposal is a cornerstone of the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles, a set of ethical guidelines for outdoor recreation that aims to minimize human impact on the environment. This is a crucial aspect of **sustainable outdoor recreation**.

Techniques for Environmentally Sound Defecation in the Wilderness

The key to responsible waste disposal is proper preparation and execution. Here's a step-by-step guide:

Choosing the Right Location

- **Distance from Water Sources:** Locate your toilet area at least 200 feet (60 meters) away from any water source, such as streams, rivers, lakes, or springs. The further, the better.
- **Well-drained Soil:** Choose a spot with well-drained soil to ensure proper decomposition. Avoid areas with rocky or clay-like soil that might hinder decomposition.
- **Level Ground:** Select a level or gently sloping area to prevent erosion and contamination.
- **Away from Trails and Campsites:** Bury your waste away from trails and campsites to prevent any unpleasant surprises for other users.

Digging a Cathole

The most common and effective method for disposing of human waste in the wilderness is digging a cathole.

- **Depth and Size:** Dig a hole at least 6-8 inches (15-20 centimeters) deep and 4-6 inches (10-15 centimeters) wide. For larger deposits, a larger hole may be necessary.
- **Tools:** Use a trowel or a sturdy stick. If you are using a stick, ensure it's not one that has been used in any other way.
- **Fill and Camouflage:** After depositing your waste, cover it completely with soil and carefully camouflage the area to prevent animals from digging it up. Remove all traces of toilet paper.

Using Waste Disposal Bags

In areas where cathole digging is impossible (e.g., rocky terrain, areas with shallow soil, high-density trails), **waste disposal bags** offer a viable alternative. Always pack out your waste in this case. Make sure to follow Leave No Trace ethics by securing the bag tightly to prevent leaks and odors. Many biodegradable bags are designed to break down within months.

Hygiene and Sanitation

Maintain proper hygiene after defecation. Carry hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol and thoroughly cleanse your hands after completing the process. Proper hygiene helps prevent the spread of germs and disease, both for yourself and the environment.

Waste Disposal Bags: A Deeper Dive

Waste disposal bags are a vital tool for environmentally conscious outdoor enthusiasts. While always aiming for cathole burial as the ideal method, sometimes the terrain simply doesn't allow it. Choosing the right bag is crucial. Look for bags that are specifically designed for human waste, often labeled as "waste bags" or "biodegradable waste bags." These bags are designed to break down more quickly than ordinary plastic bags. Check the manufacturer's claim about decomposition time. Some even boast bacteria-resistant properties. However, regardless of the claims, it's crucial to always pack out these bags, as complete decomposition may take more time than you are comfortable with.

Conclusion

Mastering the art of responsible waste disposal in the wilderness is essential for maintaining the health of our natural environments and upholding Leave No Trace ethics. By following these guidelines – proper location selection, appropriate cathole digging techniques, or using waste disposal bags when necessary, and diligent hygiene – we can all contribute to the preservation of our wild spaces for generations to come. Remember, it's not just about avoiding unpleasant experiences; it's about responsible stewardship of the natural world.

FAQ

Q1: What if I can't dig a cathole?

A1: If the ground is too hard, rocky, or frozen to dig a cathole, use a waste disposal bag. Pack it out with you. This is crucial for minimizing environmental impact. Never leave waste behind.

Q2: How do I properly dispose of toilet paper?

A2: Ideally, toilet paper should be packed out with you in a sealed plastic bag. If you're in a remote area where this isn't feasible, bury the paper along with your waste in the cathole and ensure the area is well covered. Biodegradable toilet paper may decompose more readily, but packing it out remains the most responsible approach.

Q3: What about menstrual waste?

A3: Menstrual products should always be packed out. They should be wrapped securely in multiple bags to prevent leaks.

Q4: Are there any health concerns related to handling human waste?

A4: Yes, there is a risk of exposure to pathogens. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or a strong hand sanitizer after handling waste.

Q5: Can I use a shovel instead of a trowel?

A5: A shovel is generally too large for efficient cathole digging and can cause unnecessary soil disturbance. A trowel or even a sturdy stick is more suitable.

Q6: What if I'm in a heavily trafficked area?

A6: Even in busy areas, attempt to find a secluded spot away from trails and campsites. If impossible, you should utilize a waste disposal bag and pack out your waste. Prioritize leaving no trace even when faced with these challenging scenarios.

Q7: How long does it take for human waste to decompose?

A7: Decomposition time depends heavily on several factors, including soil conditions, temperature, and moisture. While biodegradable materials will break down quicker, it can still take several months to fully decompose in ideal conditions. This is why packing out the waste is the surest and safest option.

Q8: Is burying my waste in the snow a viable option?

A8: No. Burying waste in the snow is not a suitable alternative. The waste will not decompose properly and will be exposed as the snow melts. You should always pack out your waste in snow-covered areas.

How to Relieve Oneself in the Woods: An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Neglected Art

For many, the idea of eliminating waste in the wilderness evokes images of disgusting messes. However, with a little knowledge and respect for the environment, defecation in the outdoors can be a clean, efficient, and environmentally responsible practice – a revived skill vital for outdoor adventurers. This guide will equip you with the tools to relieve yourself in nature while minimizing your footprint on the delicate equilibrium of the wilderness.

Choosing Your Throne: The CAT Method

Before you even consider dropping your trousers, finding the right location is paramount. Remember the CAT method:

- **Consider the proximity from water sources:** Excrement should be at least 200 feet distant from any river, especially uphill. This prevents contamination of drinking water.
- **Assess the surroundings:** Look for a flat area, ideally with a little protection from air currents. Avoid areas with dense foliage that could obscure your excrement and hinder breakdown. A raised area is also preferred for better drainage.
- **Take your tools with you:** This includes toilet paper (biodegradable is strongly recommended!), a small trowel or shovel for digging a cat hole, and hand sanitizer.

The Science of the Cat Hole

The cat hole is the cornerstone of environmentally responsible wilderness bowel movements. It's a small hole, roughly 6-8 inches deep, dug to inter your feces. Here's how to do it correctly:

1. **Dig:** Use your trowel to dig a hole that's deep enough to entirely conceal your excrement. The deeper, the better.

2. **Deposit:** Do your business into the hole.
3. **Bury:** Thoroughly cover your feces with soil. Make sure there's no visible waste remaining. Pack the soil firmly to deter animals from digging it up.
4. **Clean Up:** Use your biodegradable toilet paper and meticulously inter it with the soil. You can in addition add a thin layer of soil on top of the toilet paper before covering the entire hole.
5. **Sanitize:** Use hand sanitizer after completing the process.

Beyond the Cat Hole: Additional Considerations

- **Leave No Trace:** Invariably pack out all your garbage. This includes spent toilet paper, even if it's biodegradable. If you're unable to pack out, you must bury it very deeply.
- **Human Waste Bags:** In areas where digging is impossible, human waste bags are a practical alternative. These bags are designed to enclose your waste and prevent environmental contamination. Always pack these out with you.
- **Menstrual Hygiene:** For women, using menstrual cups or biodegradable pads minimizes environmental impact significantly compared to conventional sanitary products. Remember to pack out used products.
- **Group Bowel Movements:** When trekking in a group, establish a designated area further from trails and water sources for collective waste elimination. Ensure everyone follows the CAT method.

The Significance of Responsible Wilderness Elimination

Ignoring to practice responsible wilderness defecation can have detrimental consequences:

- **Water Contamination:** Uncovered waste can contaminate water sources, potentially causing illness and posing a risk to human health and wildlife.
- **Soil Degradation:** Incorrect waste elimination can alter soil composition and ecosystem health.

- **Wildlife Attraction:** Animals may be attracted to uncovered human excrement, which can disrupt natural behaviors and spread disease.
- **Unpleasant Sight:** Leaving your feces visible not only degrades the environment but also detracts from the enjoyment of other outdoor users.

By practicing the techniques outlined above, we can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors while ensuring its preservation for future generations. This rediscovered skill is an essential part of responsible outdoor stewardship.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

Q1: What if I can't dig a hole? A: In areas with hard ground, rocky terrain, or frozen soil, human waste bags are a suitable alternative. Always pack them out with you.

Q2: Is biodegradable toilet paper truly biodegradable? A: While biodegradable toilet paper breaks down faster than conventional paper, it still requires time and appropriate conditions. Bury it thoroughly to ensure proper decomposition.

Q3: How far away from trails should I go? A: Aim for at least 200 feet away from trails and water sources to minimize the impact on the environment and other users.

Q4: What about significant bowel movements? A: For larger bowel movements, a slightly larger and deeper cat hole is recommended. Ensure you thoroughly cover the excrement and pack the soil firmly.

Q5: What if I'm stranded and don't have a trowel? A: In an emergency situation, use a stick or your hands to create a shallow hole. The priority is to bury the waste as best you can to prevent contamination.

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