

Outdoor stuff that doesn't work



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

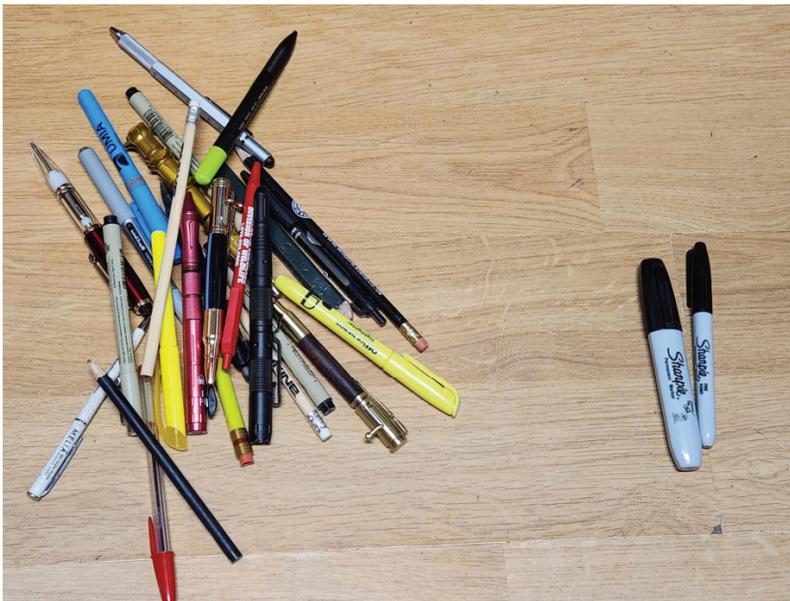
I openly admit that I spend way too much money on outdoor gear. Hunting, fishing, and backpacking, all come at a hefty price, especially if you want to stay up with the latest and greatest. If I don't buy it, and give it a fair shake, how would I know it doesn't work?

My wife does not understand that logic. She says, "If it isn't broke, don't try to fix it."

Well, I am not a sucker for the "new and improved" labels you see on everything. I take offense to them. What was I using before, old and inferior? But what really grinds my gears is stuff that doesn't do what it is supposed to do.

The other day, I was digging in my pack for a pen to write a note with. There were no less than 5 ballpoint pens in my pack, and none of them would write. They had been frozen at one time or another, and that seems to be a death sentence to a ballpoint pen. Hunters know you need a pen to sign your tag with, while in the field, no pencils allowed.

I have since switched over to a Sharpie. They are made with alcohol



On the left is everything that doesn't work when I need something to write with. On the right, is what does work, a Sharpie, although, it is a bit much for letter writing. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

in them, which helps keep them from freezing. My sharpie has made a dozen cold weather trips and is still going strong. Ballpoint ink does not have any anti-freeze in them, so below freezing, they are worthless.

Before you say something about a pencil, I have had my differences with them too. The only pencil that works is the wooden one we used to learn how to write with in first grade. You remember that pencil because it was so big, it rested on your shoulder when you wrote with it. I tried those mechanical pencils, with the .07mm lead, but I break off all the lead, and the pencil is empty before I get a sentence written.

Another item that gets a thumbs down from me is the space blanket. I bet just about everyone has at least 1 or 2 of these things in their pack and first aid kit, but have you

ever tried to use one? In a pinch, such as treating an injured person, they are better than nothing, and their reflective surface does direct heat back to the body.

The major drawback of the space blanket is the size. Most of them are 52 inches wide and 84 inches long. Not exactly something a full-sized man, like me and my 200 plus never-you-mind pound body, is going to curl up in by the fire. It is akin to taking a hot shower and trying to dry off with a hand towel.

The second drawback for them is the noise. They crinkle and crunch at every movement, sort of like trying to sleep in a box of Rice Krispies cereal. Remember, they are for emergency, not ordinary fun camping trips.

A better option is the bivy style space blanket, and I have recommended them in my columns

many times before. The bivy is like a mini sleeping bag you can strip down and crawl into. I have tried them and the bivy works very well in a pinch, although you get the crunching sound all night long from all directions.

There has been many a night I ate my supper in the woods with my hunting knife. You must be careful, lest you slit your tongue open, but it works. What does not work for me is a spork. Sporks are terrible and useless. Most of your meals in the field you can eat with a spoon, and the ones that require a fork, the spork just doesn't cut it. The tines are too short and rounded, so you really can't get a job into anything.

I even tried a folding titanium spork, by Toaks, and it kept collapsing on itself when open. Since then, I carry a real fork, and a spoon. The

amount of aggravation caused by inferior eating utensils, just isn't worth a few ounces of less weight.

Small solar chargers are another thing to leave home. If the solar charger is about the size of your cell phone, it is pretty much useless. In order to be effective, a solar charger needs to be much bigger, and you probably don't want to carry it in your pack.

You will get more mileage out of a portable battery back. I found one that has 40,000mah, which is enough to charge my phone about 5 times. The battery pack is not much bigger than the phone itself. In order to be effective, a solar charger needs to be much bigger, and you probably don't want to carry it in your pack.

Stuff sacks are another thing I quit using. At first, it sounded like a good idea, having everything sorted out in different sacks. My problem is I never remember what sack I put the item in, so I dump everything out of all the sacks in a big heap, searching for the missing item. It gets tedious, so I am back to things in the pockets of my pack.

A compass should be in everyone's pack. Spend a few bucks and get a better quality one. Those made by Silva have worked for me. Liquid filled crystals are much more stable and easier to use. I have a non-liquid crystal, gas station compass, that points north in a different place every time. You would not want to depend on a

compass like that. That cheap compass could get Santa Claus lost.

Another item to leave at home is the bear bells. These are designed to be worn on your shoe, tied up with the laces. The theory is, you will jingle when you walk, and the bears, hearing the bells, will scurry away and leave you alone.

If you spend any time with someone wearing bear bells in the woods, you will probably go insane. It is like taking a walk with all 8 of Santa's Reindeer at the same time. I guess the bears will leave you alone, but bears have never caused me any trouble in the woods in the first place. I like seeing them.

Many of these gadgets simply annoy me. My wife says it has something to do with my advancing years and a lack of patience. I think it is just better if I leave everything that doesn't work at home, while I head to the woods.

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Consider Lavender as a holiday tree



Gardening From A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

When was the last time that you got really excited about a plant in the gardening world? I can tell you when it was for me. It was at Camelot Gardens a few days ago when I was browsing for Christmas gifts. That's when I came across a Lavender Tree sitting rather inconspicuously among the similar looking Rosemary Christmas trees. At first I wasn't sure what I was seeing. Could this be lavender? Sure enough, the tag said it was a lavender tree, *Lavandula x gingsii*, 'Goodwin Creek Gray'. Oh be still my heart! How exciting! Lavender that looks like a Christmas tree. Wow!

Why didn't I ever think to prune one of my lavender plants into the shape of a little Christmas tree? I've pruned rosemary into

the shape of a little tree to decorate with at the holidays but it never occurred to me to try this with my lavender. This was a kind of special lavender though. This cultivar has really striking, unusual, and interesting foliage.

Of course I had to rush home and research this unique plant. I found out it's described as having "highly ornamental leaves". This is definitely what caught my attention. This is unlike the typically smooth "slender" leaves characteristic to English lavenders and lavandins. This plant has soft, fuzzy, or "wooly", toothed leaves. And just as interesting, the foliage is a beautiful silvery-gray. Hence the "gray" in its name comes from this beautiful foliage. The toothed margins are inherited from the L. dentate lavender plant. It's commonly known as French lavender, fringed lavender, or toothed lavender.

The only problem is, this magnificent specimen is only hardy to zones 8-11. We're a zone 4 or 5 so we're a little too cold for this wonderful plant. Dang, I had planned to plant it my garden along with my other lavender plants, which are deer and

rabbit resistant. Although a big buck was happily munching on one of my lavender plants just the other day.

This cute little guy will grow to be about 3 feet wide and 3 feet tall, that is if I can manage to keep it alive in the house for the next several winters. But that may not be too hard. They basically want bright light and they don't like to be over watered or under watered. I should be able to handle that. This lavender is native to the arid regions of Spain, North Africa, Ethiopia, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. That tells me a lot about its care.

I'm planning to give it summer vacations outside and bring it back indoors in the fall. They say it gets lavender-hued purple flowers that bloom off and on throughout the summer. That's going to be striking with the serrated gray leaves. I'm excited to see that! I'm going to try to keep it pruned back to a manageable size, but I figure if it outgrows the house I have a friend with a heated year-round greenhouse. I'm sure she would be more than happy to adopt such a wonderful plant.

I'd like to keep it pruned



This unique little table top tree is actually a lavender plant. (Photo/Linda Corwine McIntosh)

into the shape of a little Christmas tree. I think it's going to be a pleasure pruning it. It will smell so

good while I'm trimming it! My research said the plants also make great topiary trees. Who knew?

I may have to get another one to try that.

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