PACKING Q&A *and two expert packers' diagrams:*

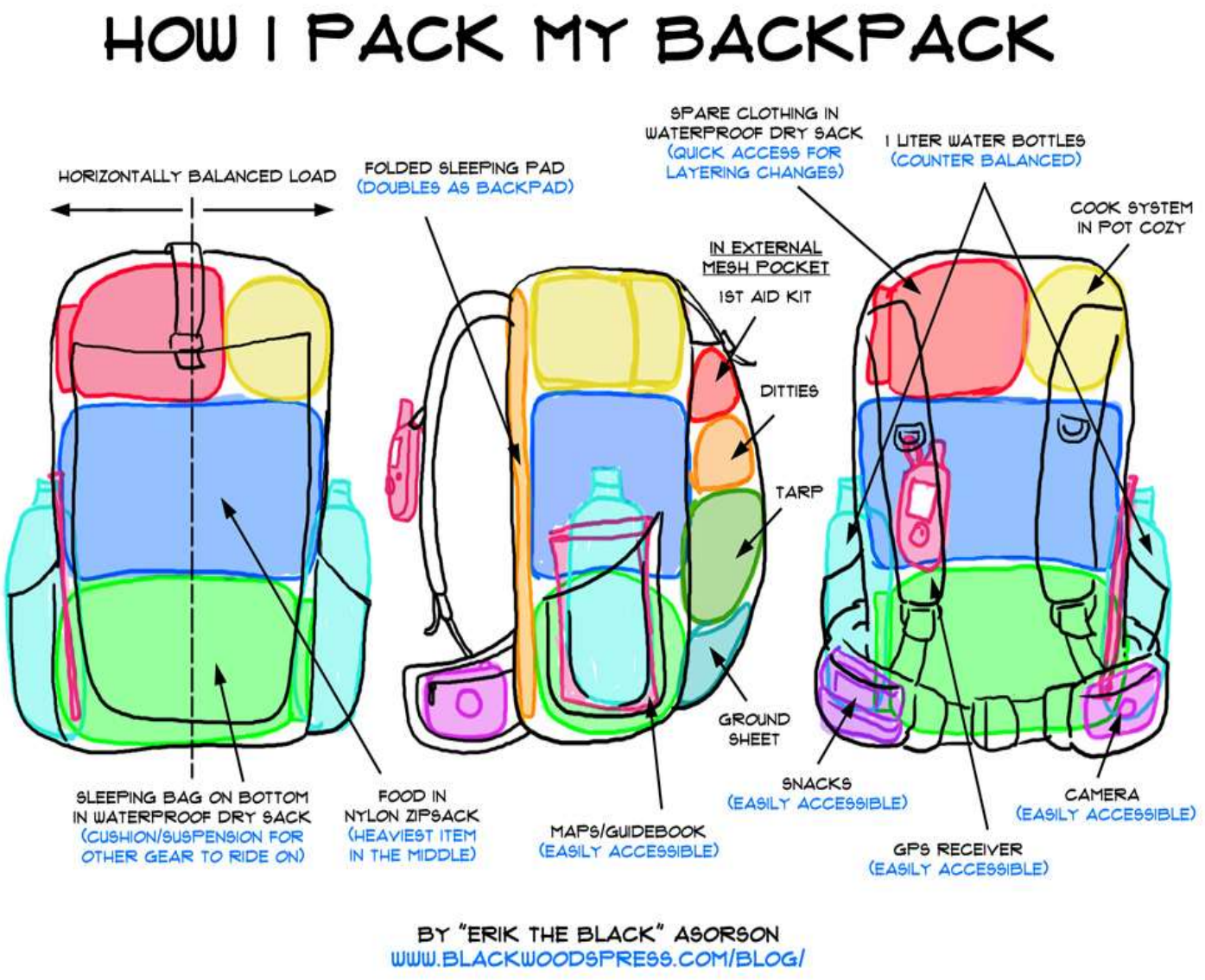
(Courtesy of Barefoot Theory and Blackwood Press if you want to check out their Blogs)

What are the different pockets on my backpack for?

While backpacks may differ slightly by company or design, most modern packs share a few common traits that improve your gear organization. From helping more efficiently distribute weight to keeping essential items accessible, specialty pockets can be a big help in making the most out of your backpack.

The Backpack's Brain

The aptly named "brain"—the uppermost zippered pocket that straddles the top of most packs—is your grab n' go center once you're on the trail. It's perfect for storing compact, often-used items like snacks, navigation tools and headlamps. Use it correctly and you'll shave time off your pit stops and you' be able to grab important items quickly.

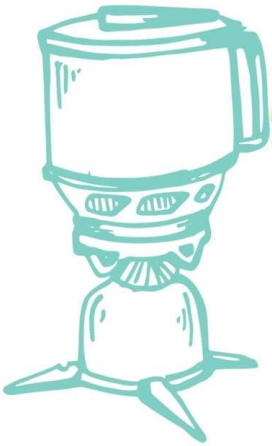


PRO-TIP: If there's a chance of rain on your backpacking trip and you don't have a waterproof pack cover, before you put anything in your pack, line your bag with a trash bag and put all your items inside the liner to stay dry. It's also a good idea to use a lightweight waterproof compression sack to keep your sleeping bag dry. Not necessary for new hikers, but worth the investment.

HOW TO PACK A BACKPACKING PACK

A good rule to follow when you pack your backpack for camping and hiking is to pack in three parts: bottom, middle and top.

Always pack the bottom first, balance the load by keeping heavy things in the center and stash your essentials for the trail on top. This way the things you need are always within reach and don't require taking off your pack and digging through the whole thing. Here's a breakdown of how to pack a backpack for camping and hiking.



WHAT GOES IN THE BRAIN:

- Travel sized bug spray and sunscreen
- Map or GPS
- Headlamp
- Camera
- Quick snack
- Spork
- Multi-tool
- Lighter

MIDDLE OF YOUR BACKPACK:

HEAVIEST ITEMS

- stove & fuel
- food/bear canister
- loose clothing stuffed around bear canister
- toiletries
- camp mug

SIDE POCKETS:

- Trekking poles
- Tent poles
- Water bottles

HIP BELT POCKETS:

- Lip balm
- Phone

BOTTOM OF YOUR BACKPACK:

LIGHT ITEMS THAT YOU WON'T NEED DURING THE DAY

- Sleeping bag in a compression sack
- sleeping pad
- loose clothing stuffed around sleeping bag to fill in gaps

TOP OF YOUR BACKPACK:

- Rain jacket, rain pants, rain cover
- Lunch
- First Aid
- Water filter
- Electronics in a lightweight dry sack
- Bathroom kit (shovel, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and a bag to pack out used toilet paper

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PRO-TIP: First, pack your sleeping bag at the bottom. Then use loose clothing that you won't need during the day to fill in the gaps on the edges. *(Some people like to put their clothes in a separate sack, some leave individual items of clothing not needed during the day to fill in the gaps; either is fine.)*