



HOW TO CHOOSE A HIKING BOOT

Type, Features & Fit

Types: You have a dizzying array of choices, from ultralight trail shoes to mountaineering boots.

Components: Understanding a little more about what goes into uppers, lowers, midsoles, outsoles and other parts of a boot can help you refine your selection.

Fit: No one ever loved a pair of ill-fitting boots. The difference between blisters and bliss is taking the time to get a great fit.

Types of Hiking Boots

HIKING SHOES Low-cut models with flexible midsoles are excellent for day hiking. Some ultralight backpackers may even choose trail-running shoes for long-distance journeys.

DAY HIKING BOOTS These range from mid- to high-cut models and are intended for day hikes or short backpacking trips with light loads. They often flex easily and require little break-in time, but they lack the support and durability of stout backpacking boots.

BACK-PACKING BOOTS These are designed to carry heavier loads on multiday trips deep into the backcountry. Most have a high cut that wraps above the ankles for excellent support. Durable and supportive, with stiffer midsoles than lighter footwear, they are suitable for on- or off-trail travel.

Components

HIKING BOOT UPPERS Materials impact a boot's weight, breathability, durability and water resistance.

FULL-GRAIN LEATHER Full-grain leather offers excellent durability and abrasion resistance and very good water resistance.

SPLIT-GRAIN LEATHER Split-grain leather is usually paired with nylon or nylon mesh to create a lightweight boot that offers excellent breathability.

NUBUCK LEATHER Nubuck leather is full-grain leather that has been buffed to resemble suede. It is very durable and resists water and abrasion.

SYNTHETICS Polyester, nylon and so-called "synthetic leather" are all commonly found in modern boots. They are lighter than leather, break in more quickly, dry faster and usually cost less.

WATERPROOF Boots and shoes billed as "waterproof" feature uppers constructed with waterproof/breathable membranes (such as Gore-Tex® or eVent®) to keep feet dry in wet conditions.

VEGAN Vegan-friendly hiking boots and shoes are made without any animal ingredients or byproducts.

INSULATION Synthetic insulation is added to some mountaineering boots for warmth when hiking on snow and glaciers.

MIDSOLES **EVA:** is a bit cushier, lighter and less expensive. Midsoles use varying densities of EVA to provide firmer support where needed.

Polyurethane: is generally firmer and more durable, so it's usually found in extended backpacking and mountaineering boots.

INTERNAL SUPPORT **Shanks:** These 3–5mm thick inserts are sandwiched between a boot's midsole and outsole to add load-bearing stiffness to the midsole. They vary in length; some cover the entire length of the midsole, while others only cover half.

Plates: These thin, semiflexible inserts are positioned between the midsole and the outsole, and below the shank (if included). They protect feet from getting bruised by roots or uneven rocks.

OUTSOLES **Lug pattern:** Lugs are traction-giving bumps on the outsole. Deeper, thicker lugs are used on backpacking and mountaineering boots to improve grip. Widely spaced lugs offer good traction and shed mud more easily.

Heel brake: This refers to the clearly defined heel zone that is distinct from the forefoot and arch. It reduces your chance of sliding during steep descents.

Fit Tips

- Know your size.
- Try on boots at the end of the day.
- If you wear orthotics, bring them along.
- Wear appropriate socks.
- Spend some time in the boots.
- When shopping online, consider a brand you've worn before.
- Consider aftermarket insoles.
- Break your boots in before your first trip.



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