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Camping Hammock

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- Skills and guides - DIY, Making things. -



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Description :

This article describes a light weight nylon hammock which was sewn out of an old nylon parachute.

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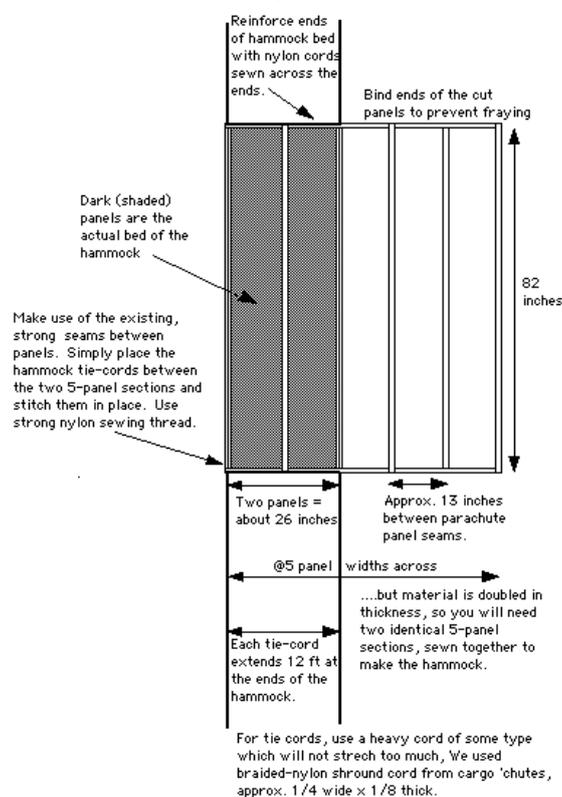
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Camping Hammock

It is pretty simple to make up, light in weight, dries quickly if you get it wet, and is pretty versatile. While this hammock was made up to satisfy a specific need in a tropical region, the same design could be used as a light weight sleeping platform in any moderate temperature region. It is the very same type hammock that Neil Andrews described as a "Thai hammock" in his excellent article "All Kitted Out".

The following diagrams show a simple hammock we used in SE Asia many years ago (back in the ancient 60's!) when we were conducting operations for extended periods in regions of damp rain forest and thick secondary jungle. It was not particularly desirable to sleep on the ground in most of these areas since insects, snakes, millipedes, scorpions, ringworms, leeches, etc. were everywhere and the ground was frequently wet. So whenever security allowed, we strung & slept in hammocks. The region was perpetually wet, so we needed a hammock which was not only tough & light, but made of a material which would dry quickly and not rot too readily. The solution was to use old dark-colored nylon parachutes. We took our old 'chutes to a local tailor. He had some experience in making them for our unit (this hammock is NOT an original idea of mine), so he was able to whip them out in no time. My finished hammock ended up weighing about 2 pounds and rolled to about a 4 inch diameter x 14 inches long size.

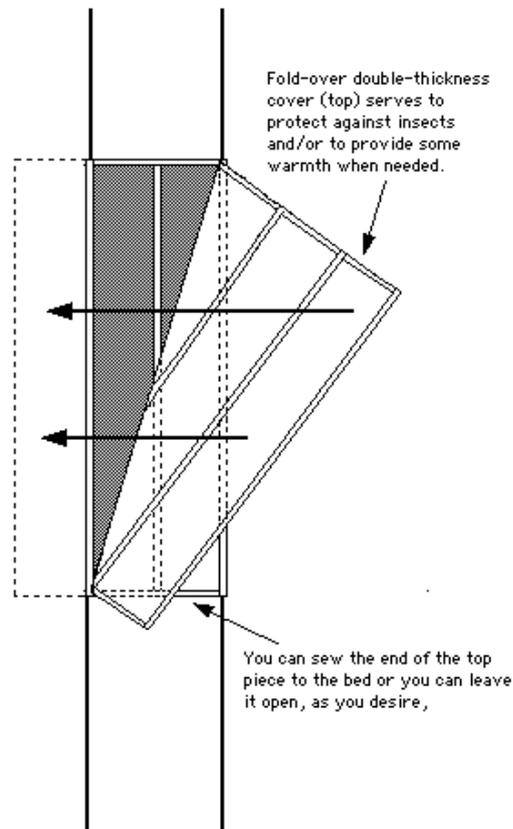
The old 'chutes we used were of varying sizes, but my own hammock (I still have it!) was made from a 'chute with the individual panels (gores) about 13-14 inches wide. The flat seams of these panels were, of course, strongly sewn together, so the final hammock was based on keeping these original panels together to the maximum extent. My hammock ended up having a "bed" about 26 inches wide (2 panels wide) and about 82 inches long, with an attached cover 3-panels wide to serve as warmth/insect protection when sleeping. Two sets of these @5-panel-wide sections were sewn together to make a final hammock which ended up having a dual-layer thickness of ripstop OD nylon: two layers as the bed part you laid on, two layers above you as a cover. The tie-cords used to string up the hammock were long sections of heavy braided nylon from cargo 'chutes. The tailor used some heavy nylon thread which we got for him (local cotton thread was too weak). The key to strength was to use the existing panel seams and to sew the tie-cords securely down the length of the hammock along these seams. See the following diagram:



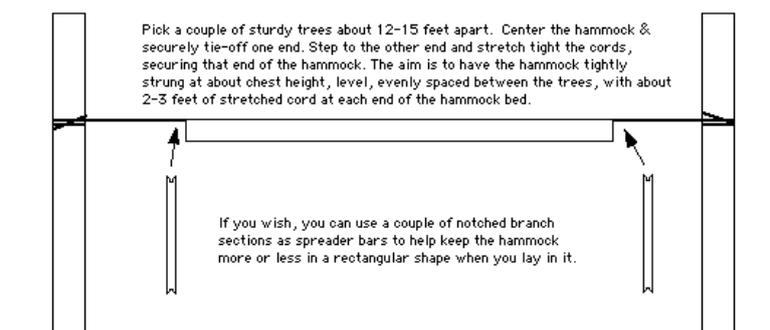
The ends of the hammock "bed" needed reinforcement and of course, any cut section of 'chute material had to be

Camping Hammock

seamed/bound to prevent ripping or fraying. We found the fold-over top or cover to be useful in discouraging insects and in providing warmth in those situations where we had to sleep while soaking wet or where we got into cooler temperatures in mountainous areas. When it was warm, we simply folded the cover over on the hammock bed and slept atop all layers. Sewing the cover to the bed across the foot of the "bed" is a matter of choice. It helps keep the top in place but it also makes it a bit slower to exit your feet from the hammock in an emergency. Your choice.

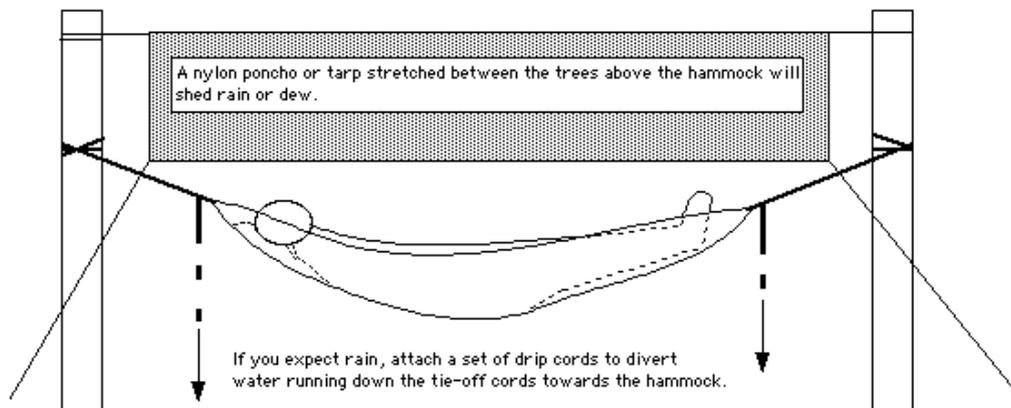


Using the hammock takes a bit of practice. You have to reconcile yourself to sleeping in a downward-sagging position...not on a tightly stretched "recreational" hammock. But if you are tired, believe me, it works great. Some people did not mind sleeping on a loose, sagging hammock. Most of us wanted to stretch the hammock as tightly as possible before getting into it. If your hammock bed is about 7 feet long, you need a pair of trees about 12+ feet apart so you can stretch your hammock tightly between them, leaving 2-3 feet of tie-down cord between hammock & tree at each end. That is the reason for having tie-cords about 12 feet long at all four corners.....so you can securely tie off your hammock. You want to really tighten, stretch the hammock between the trees, so that when you get it, your sagging body is still well above the ground. Most people find an initial chest-height stretching works well. Spreader bars are a nice option; they help keep the hammock from wrapping around you as you lie in it. As the diagram suggests, it takes a bit of practice getting in & out. I have seen people try to take a flying leap into the strung hammock and quickly getting flipped out on to the ground.



Camping Hammock

A poncho or tarp strung between the trees above the hammock provides good rain protection yet still lets in plenty of air. A hammock & poncho rig like this (collectively termed a "basha" in that region) worked remarkably well in providing as comfortable an overnight shelter as could have been expected under the circumstances. About the only downside to using a hammock system like this (where we were working) was it was not good to be caught up above ground level if the bullets or shrapnel were likely to start flying during the night. So there were times when we elected to sleep on the ground with the critters. And of course, a light hammock like this would not be very good in a cold environment. But I suspect the system could work OK in any moderate temperature situation.



You mount the hammock carefully by rolling your body into it. It will, of course, sag down considerably. But if you have stretched it tightly, you will still safely be above the ground. Dismount carefully by first swinging your feet out of the hammock & down to the ground, then roll your bulk out of the hammock.

For insect protection, the fold-over cover may suffice. Or you can combine that with a mosquito head net. In my experience, that is usually sufficient. Or for more protection, you can sew up a large "sack" of stiff mosquito mesh to fit over your head & upper torso as you lay in the hammock. Or for even more protection, you could suspend a full-length mosquito "bar" above the hammock and tuck yourself inside it. The old 'W' II-style "jungle hammocks" which you can still find (new-made) have the rain cover & net sewn in, but these style hammocks are pretty heavy & bulky.

Where do you get an old parachute? Many military surplus stores carry them for a very low price. As long as the material & seams are in good shape, any old 'chute works fine. The tie-cords could be just about any sturdy rope of about 1/4 to 5/16 inches diameter, ideally a rope that does not stretch too greatly when the hammock is tied. You can buy commercial hammocks, of course, of nylon mesh or of cloth. I am not impressed by what I have seen for sale. They are either too heavy (the solid material ones) or leave too much of your carcass exposed to nibbling insects (the mesh hammocks). So that's why I like my old parachute hammock.

One last suggestion: In the event you need to use your hammock to serve as an emergency litter, it is handy to have some loops of nylon webbing sewn along the sides. Through these you can run some sturdy poles to quickly form a litter. Yes, you could simply sling the hammock from a single pole, but it is difficult & tiring to transport an injured person on a low-hanging, swinging hammock. The loops let you make a flatter, sturdier litter which can be handled more easily by either two or four persons. An added benefit to the loops is they also allow you to convert your hammock into a "cot" type bed for a more permanent camp.....by running poles thru the loops and making some scissors-type uprights at each end to keep the poles spread apart. Maybe I will show that in another post.....

Camping Hammock

If you want to make your hammock ready to serve as a litter in an emergency, you might want to sew some flat-nylon loops at intervals along the sides. That will facilitate attaching some sturdy poles to make the hammock into a temporary litter.

4-5 loops securely sewn into place on each side

