

Summer Recreation GUIDE



Installing an Above-Ground Pool

If you're looking to cool off in your own backyard, without the expense of an in-ground pool, consider an above-ground model.

Above-ground pools are affordable, and basic models are relatively easy for homeowners to install.

Before you buy, however, consider how much maintenance will be needed and be prepared to commit to the pool's care.

TYPES OF POOLS

Above-ground pools range in price from a few hundred dollars for an inflatable model to a few thousand dollars for a model with rigid metal walls.

A traditional above-ground pool consists of a steel or aluminum wall, resin or metal posts, a top ledge to add support, a vinyl liner and a pump and filter system.

They may be round or oval in shape, with a diameter of 12 to 33 feet and depths of 48 to 54 inches. Many models come with ground cover and a pool cover. Some include a ladder.

Measure the available space in your yard and consider any local zoning laws or HOA restrictions.

According to pool manufacturer Country Leisure, traditional above-ground pools can be installed in one



day by the owner, can be re-located if you move and can easily last 15-20 years with proper maintenance.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The quality of the pump and filter system will be crucial to your pool's longevity. If the manufacturer offers an upgrade, it's wise to take advantage of it.

If your pool does not come with a cover or ladder, you

will need to purchase these separately.

You'll also need the manufacturer's recommended water quality supplies to keep your pool clean and safe.

MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

Keeping your pool clean and the pool chemistry at the proper levels will ensure the pool is safe to use and extend the pool liner's life, according

to pool supply retailer In the Swim.

Every day, run the pool filter for 12-18 hours, ensure the water level is around mid-skimmer level and test and balance the water.

Check the water's total alkalinity, pH, calcium hardness, cyanuric acid and free available chlorine. This can typically be done with a single test strip that reads instantly. Depending on the test results, you will

then need to add chemicals to reach optimal levels.

Weekly maintenance includes skimming the surface, vacuuming the floor and brushing the pool liner, adding shock and chlorine tablets, emptying the skimmer and pump baskets and cleaning the filter as needed. Monthly maintenance includes checking for hidden algae and cleaning the waterline and inside skimmer walls with tile and vinyl cleaner.

Getting Started with Cycling

Maybe you're looking to get out and enjoy nature more often, or exercise more, or perhaps you're looking for an eco-friendly mode of transportation.

You can get started cycling with just a small financial investment, and with some online research, you can learn the rules of the road and be on your way.

BENEFITS OF CYCLING

The nonprofit People for Bikes reports that 112 million Americans rode a bike in 2024. Cycling is great for both strength and aerobic exercise, but the benefits go far beyond physical health.

Cycling also has benefits for mental health and social wellbeing. UCLA reports that riding a bike boosts serotonin and dopamine, improving mood, and lowers stress hormones, and can even improve deep sleep and increase self-esteem.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BIKE

Check out your local trails and bike paths to determine where you will do most of your riding, then choose a bike accordingly. Will you spend more time on paved surfaces or more rugged trails? A hybrid bike will allow you to ride efficiently on



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both. If you're planning to commute, look for a model more suited to commuters, or perhaps an e-bike.

Visit a local bike shop to be sure the bike you choose is a good fit for your body size and type. This will ensure a comfortable, efficient ride.

ESSENTIAL GEAR AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT

You'll need a helmet. According to the American College of Surgeons, helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 48%, traumatic brain injury by 53%, facial injury by 23% and fatal injury by 34%.

The helmet must fit properly to be effective. REI recommends measuring your head circumference by wrapping a flexible tape measure around the largest portion of your head — about 1 inch above your eyebrows. An extra small helmet fits heads measuring

below 20 inches; small, 20 to 21.75 inches; medium, 21.75 to 23.25 inches; large 23.25 to 24.75 inches; extra large above 24.75 inches. One-size-fits-all helmets have an adjustable fit system.

You'll also need lights, reflectors and high-visibility clothing for safety, a basic bike repair kit and a spare tube for roadside repairs.

LEARN BASIC RIDING SKILLS AND ETIQUETTE

There are many online sources for learning basic riding skills, such as how to mount, dismount and properly balance, proper braking techniques and how to shift gears, as well as safe riding posture and cadence.

Read up on local traffic laws for cyclists, such as required hand signals, respecting pedestrians and sharing bike lanes properly.

You'll also need to learn basic bike maintenance, such as checking your tire pressure, brakes and chain before rides, and cleaning and lubricating the chain regularly. When maintaining your bike gets beyond your knowledge level, you will need a professional tune-up.

BUILDING ENDURANCE AND CONFIDENCE

Look for beginner-friendly routes and trails in your area to get started. Start with short rides and gradually increase your distance. Consider joining a local cycling group for motivation and to help learn more about cycling.

Volunteer this Summer

If you enjoy outdoor activities — be it sports such as fishing or boating, hobbies such as hiking or birding, or just working with a team — consider looking for opportunities to volunteer at local parks this summer.

Local, state and national parks are publicly funded but can always use helping hands, especially during the busy summer months. It's a great time to get outdoors and contribute to your community.

BENEFITS

Volunteering offers numerous benefits, including enhanced mental and physical health, increased social skills and confidence, a sense of purpose and the opportunity to learn new skills and make a difference in your community, according to HelpGuide.org. Depending on the opportunities available in your area, you might even be able to volunteer as a family.

Volunteering fosters a deeper connection with the local community, allowing individuals to meet like-minded people and work together towards common goals.

Volunteering can also help you gain skills that might help



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advance your career, such as leadership skills, teamwork and problem-solving, or even skills specific to your career field.

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

Publicly funded parks and recreation facilities have myriad needs for volunteers. This is even more true during the

summer months, when summer camps and recreation opportunities are in full swing, and special events such as concerts and other cultural events are typically held.

For example, the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission welcomes volunteers to help with recreation centers, special events, sports and outdoor activities.

California State Parks use volunteers as docents and campground and park hosts, and to assist with park maintenance, natural resource management such as beach and park cleanups, public safety and more.

To get started on your search for volunteer roles, visit VolunteerMatch.org or Volunteer.gov, or your local and state

parks and recreation department websites.

Be sure to check into the requirements for volunteers for a specific role. For example, you might need to be over 18, pass a background check or commit to a minimum number of volunteer hours per week. You might be required to undergo training, depending on the role you're pursuing.

The Power of Forest Bathing

In today's fast-paced world, stress and anxiety are common struggles.

One simple yet powerful way to improve mental and physical well-being is through forest bathing, or Shinrin-yoku — a Japanese practice that involves immersing oneself in the sights, sounds and smells of a forest. Think of it as returning to nature.

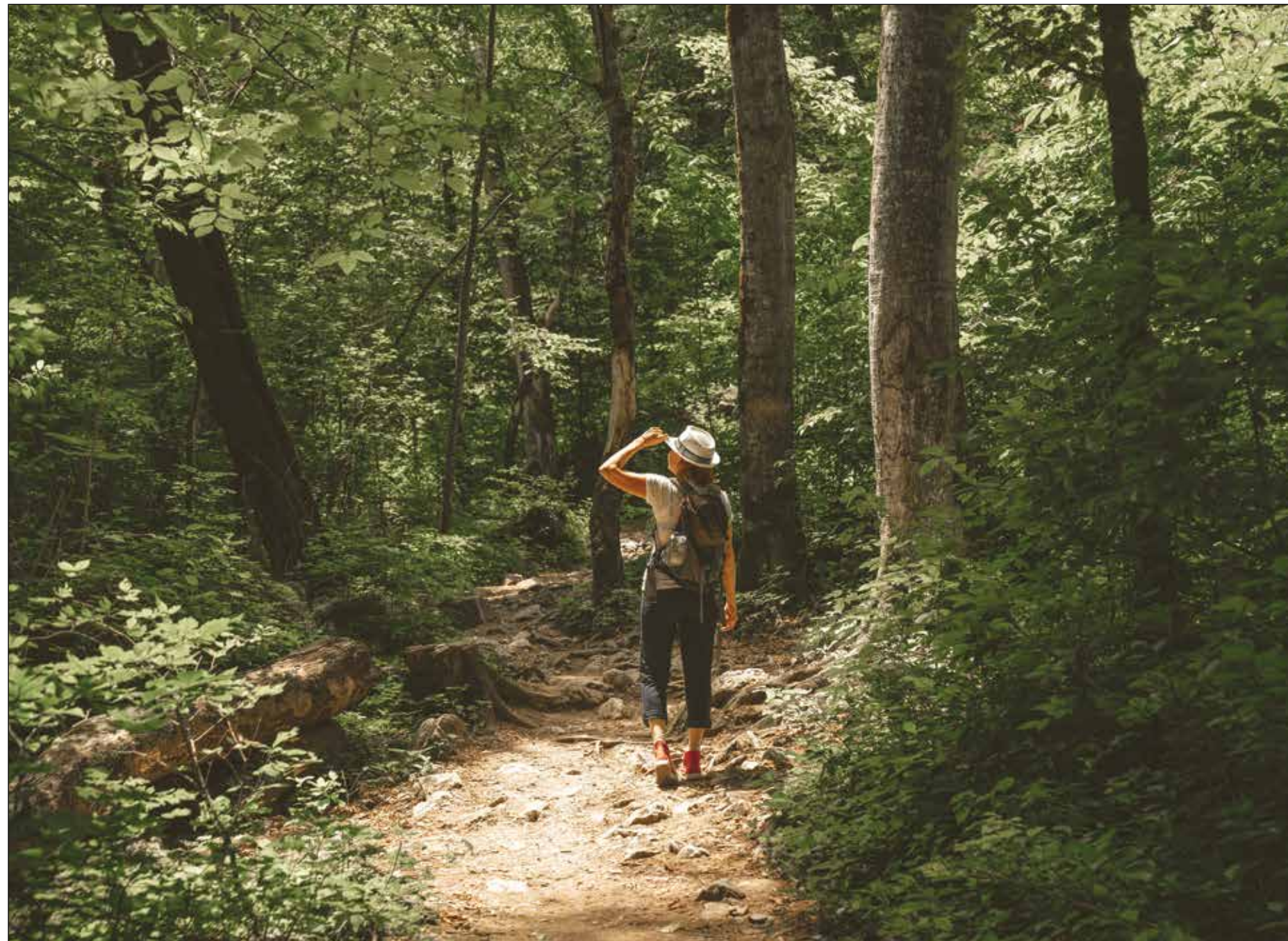
A study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* put it this way: “It is no wonder some humans yearn and are drawn back to where human physiological/psychological functions began and were naturally supported.”

WHAT IS IT?

Unlike hiking, forest bathing isn't about exercise but about mindfully connecting with nature. Forest bathing has its roots in Japan in the 1980s. Shinrin-yoku was developed as a form of preventive health care. The practice involves slowly walking through a forest, breathing deeply and engaging the senses to experience the natural environment fully.

BENEFITS

Studies have long shown that spending time in nature can improve cognitive function, creativity and concentration. More specifically, research shows that spending time in a



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forest can reduce stress, lower cortisol levels, boost immunity, reduce blood pressure and improve overall mood.

Exposure to phytoncides — natural compounds released by trees — has been linked to lower stress hormone levels and improved relaxation. National Geographic reports that the health benefits of a phytoncide “shower” can last

for weeks.

Research also suggests that forest environments increase natural killer cell activity, which helps the body fight infections and diseases.

GET STARTED

To begin your forest bathing experience, find a quiet, green space, such as a forest, park or wooded area away from

distractions.

Engage your senses. You might listen to the rustling leaves, feel the textures of trees and breathe in the earthy scent.

Move slowly and mindfully. Unlike hiking, forest bathing is about being present, not covering distance.

It's important to unplug from technology while forest

bathing. Leave your phone behind or turn it off to fully immerse yourself in nature.

Forest bathing is a simple yet transformative practice that offers profound mental and physical health benefits. Whether in a dense forest or a local park, taking time to connect with nature can improve well-being and bring a sense of peace and clarity.

Summer Camps for Families

Summer camps aren't just for kids!

Family summer camps provide opportunities for parents and children to unplug from daily routines, immerse themselves in nature and create lasting memories together.

Whether you're seeking outdoor adventures, educational programs or relaxing retreats, there's a family camp for every interest.

BENEFITS OF FAMILY SUMMER CAMPS

Spending time in a camp environment allows families to connect without distractions. Activities like campfires, canoeing and team-building games encourage cooperation and meaningful interactions.

Many family camps offer activities such as hiking, fishing, kayaking, archery and zip-lining, ensuring fun for both kids and adults. Research shows that being in nature also promotes physical health and stress relief.

TYPES OF CAMPS

Camping programs vary in length, from a few days to a week. You can choose a program that offers rustic accommodations such as shared bunk-style lodging and meals cooked over the fire, or opt for a more high-end experience with hotel-style lodging and more formal dining.

Some camps focus on a theme, such as Pinewoods in Plymouth, Mass., which offers music classes and jam sessions



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for those who are passionate about music.

Other camps focus on STEM learning, survival skills or arts and crafts, providing interactive and educational experiences for families. Programs led by naturalists, artists or scientists help kids and parents learn

together in a fun setting.

FAMILY SUMMER CAMPS TO CONSIDER

Here are three family summer camp options to consider.

1. YMCA Family Camps. YMCA camps across the country offer affordable,

all-inclusive family-friendly programs, including water sports, nature hikes and campfire nights.

2. Medomak Family Camp, Maine. This traditional New England camp offers canoeing, arts and crafts and farm-to-table meals, providing

a classic summer camp feel for all ages.

3. Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp, Montana. Located near Glacier National Park, this camp offers faith-based activities, outdoor adventures and community bonding experiences.

The Joy of Solo Vacationing

Traveling alone can be an empowering and enriching experience.

Whether you're seeking adventure, relaxation or self-discovery, solo vacationing allows for complete freedom and flexibility.

While some may find the idea intimidating, solo travel can be one of the most rewarding ways to explore the world. The American Express 2024 Global Travel Trends Report shows that solo travel is increasingly popular among young people, with 76% of Millennials and Gen-Z planning solo trips in 2025. In fact, Forbes declared 2024 “the year of the solo traveler.”

BENEFITS OF SOLO TRAVEL

Freedom and flexibility.

Solo travel means no compromises. You choose where to go, what to do and how long to stay. Whether it's spending an extra hour at a museum or taking a spontaneous detour, you have complete control over your itinerary.

Personal growth and confidence. Traveling alone pushes you out of your comfort zone. You will need to navigate new places, make decisions independently and solve problems on your own. These experiences boost self-confidence and adaptability.

Deeper cultural immersion. Without the distraction of a travel partner, solo travelers tend to engage more with



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locals, try new experiences and absorb their surroundings more deeply. This leads to authentic cultural interactions and unique connections.

DRAWBACKS

The travel industry is not exactly designed for singles. Forbes lists the “single supplement” — an upcharge for single travelers who book accommodations typically meant for at least two people — as the biggest obstacle for solo

travelers. The fee ranges from 10 to 100% of the travel cost for each person in a party of two. For example, solo cruise travelers are often charged the same fare as two people occupying a single room.

This fee is intended to help cover lost revenue for a second traveler who could otherwise be accommodated.

When planning solo travel, look for deals that advertise “no single supplement” to avoid this charge.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SOLO TRIP

Safety is paramount when traveling alone. Stay in safe accommodations, such as hotels, hostels or reputable vacation home rentals. Trust your instincts and be aware of your surroundings.

Keep emergency contacts handy and share your itinerary with a friend. It's a good idea to add an emergency contact on your phone so loved ones can be notified in case of

an emergency.

Use travel apps like Google Maps and Duolingo to navigate and communicate easily.

Solo vacationing is more than just a trip — it's a journey of self-discovery and adventure. Whether you're exploring a new city or relaxing on a secluded beach, traveling alone offers freedom, confidence and unforgettable experiences. So why wait? Start planning your solo adventure today.

Bucket List Hiking Locations

The United States is home to some of the world's most breathtaking hiking trails, offering diverse landscapes ranging from towering mountains to lush forests and desert canyons.

Whether you're an experienced trekker or a casual hiker, add these bucket list destinations to your adventure radar.

Half Dome, Yosemite National Park, California

One of the most famous hikes in the U.S., the Half Dome Trail is a 14- to 16-mile round-trip journey that challenges hikers with a steep granite ascent and cable climb. The reward? Panoramic views of Yosemite Valley and the High Sierra. A permit is required to tackle the final cable section, which spans the last 400 feet of the 4,800-foot elevation gain from Yosemite Valley. Yosemite's website describes the cable hike as "wild, airy, and not for the faint of heart."

The Narrows, Zion National Park, Utah

This unique hike takes you through the Virgin River, where you'll wade through slot canyons with towering



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walls reaching 1,000 feet high. The 16-mile top-down route requires a permit, but the shorter bottom-up route can be done without one. Proceed with caution, as life-threatening flash floods are possible at any time and are common during the monsoon season.

Angel's Landing, Zion National Park, Utah

A bucket list favorite, Angel's Landing is a 5.4-mile round-trip hike with thrilling

knife-edge ridges and steep drop-offs. This 1,488-foot tall rock formation was previously known as the Temple of Aeolus. A renowned trail cut into solid rock in 1926 leads to the top of Angels Landing and provides panoramic views of Zion Canyon.

The final ascent involves gripping chain-assisted sections, but the views of Zion Canyon are worth the adrenaline rush. A permit is required.

The Wonderland Trail, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington

This 93-mile loop encircles Mount Rainier, offering a diverse landscape of glaciers, alpine meadows and waterfalls. Completing the full trek takes 10 to 14 days, but shorter sections provide stunning scenery for those with less time. Mount Rainier Tourism urges hikers to be prepared for mud, rain, sun and even snow in the summer months, as the trail is still

mostly snow-covered during June and early July.

Kalalau Trail, Nā Pali Coast, Hawaii

A true tropical paradise, this 22-mile round-trip hike provides the only land access to this part of Kauai's rugged coastline, with lush valleys, dramatic sea cliffs and secluded beaches. A permit is required for overnight camping at Kalalau Beach and hiking past Hanakapi'aiz.