# Getting Prepared: Choosing Equipment

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Please note that I stopped updating the online version of this information in 2017, because I turned it into a chapter in the "Step By Step, A Tree Planter's Handbook" publication starting in 2018. It is updated there annually. More information can be found at: www.replant.ca/stepbystep

## Introduction

I'm going to try to make this simple, and put a summary list right up front. This list will include items that I think a planter should consider bringing with them for a season of planting. I'll go into more detail about many of the listed items as we get further down the page. What is important to remember is that the list here is things to consider. Most of the items are highly recommended, but a few are not mandatory – whether or not you bring them will depend on personal preference and how much storage/carrying capacity you have.

A first year planter once sent me this question: "I was wondering what your take was on this. I have never planted before and the company I am working for said I am mainly going to be working out of bush camps. I have worked at fire camps and I know what gear to bring and not to bring. My problem is we were either driven right out to our sites or flown there and I don't know how it works with tree planting. If I have to haul my camping gear in for a long distance it is pretty damn heavy. Should I be really concerned about weight?"

The answer to the above question is, "Yes and no." Planting (out of a camp) will be like working in fire camps. You will probably never have to pack your gear in long distances ... you will almost always be able to drive right into camp, and when that is not possible there will be rolligons or haglunds or helicopters taking you right into camp. So technically, no, you don't have to worry about weight.

However, having said that, you'll obviously want to use some common sense. Cutting back on what you bring with you is critical. Don't leave things at home that you'll definitely need, but at the same time remember that whatever you bring, you will have to take care of all summer, and this includes times in town when you're between contracts. My basic rule is that if you can't fit everything that you own into two hockey bags, you've got too much stuff. It's amazing how quickly the pickup trucks fill up with planters' personal gear when moving camp. The less you have, the more efficient and mobile you'll be when you're moving or travelling. By the way, hockey bags ARE a great way of carrying gear around, and they are sturdy. Duffle bags are too. And some people use backpacks. I'd say that the most common combinations of carrying devices that I see on planters flying in for a new season would be either a hockey back and a backpack, or a duffle bag and a backpack.

*A hockey bag can hold your tent, camping tarp, sleeping bag, and other gear.*

*You can also buy large duffle bags at many discount retail superstores.*

## Equipment List

Items on this list are generally indispensable, or at the very least, highly recommended. Full descriptions of what to look for are provided further down the page.

**Clothing:**

- Work boots.
- A caulk-wrench and spare caulks, if you wear caulked boots (optional).
- Rain gear.
- Work pants.
- Long underwear/sweat pants.
- Belt. You'll lose a lot of weight and your pants will start to fall off.
- T-shirts, and long sleeved work shirts.
- Long-sleeved fleece.
- Socks and underwear.
- Hat.
- Gloves.
- Town clothes and boots (hiking shoes).

**Planting Gear:**

- Set of planting bags.
- Shovel.
- Silvicool inserts for planting bags (you'll need three).
- Water jug.
- Plot cord – 3.99 meter.
- Safety whistle (use something like a Fox 40 – the whistle built into the straps of BushPro bags is not adequate, as it isn't very loud, and fills up with dirt very quickly).

**Toiletries and Medicinal:**

- The basics – toothbrush, deodorant, shaving kit, etc.
- Females should not put much emphasis on bringing makeup. Anyone who wears makeup in a planting camp shouldn't be in a planting camp. Maybe you'll wear some on a night off in town, or at the year-end party, but not in camp.
- Hand cream/moisturizer. Creams with vitamin E are great.
- Sun tan lotion.
- Fingernail clippers.
- Vaseline, lip balm, and either Zincofax or Penaten for chafing and rashes. Penaten also works well for cuts on the hands, and is cheap.
- Solarcaine, in case you get a bad sunburn (optional).
- Zantac for indigestion (optional).
- Heat rub for sore muscles (optional).
- Tylenol/Aspirin/Advil or other painkillers, muscle relaxants such as Roboxacet, or anti-inflammatories such as Aleve (all optional).
- Antihistamines, if you might have allergies/hay fever (optional).

**Miscellaneous:**

- Tent.
- Sleeping bag.
- Large "foamie" which acts as cushioning under your sleeping bag.
- Small pack or bag for lunch and rain gear, known as your "day bag."
- Insect repellent containing DEET.
- Battery powered Coleman lantern, and lots of batteries (optional).

- Wind-up alarm clock (something that doesn't rely on batteries is handy – you may have problems keeping a phone charged).
- Flashlight, with lots of batteries. Or even better, get a wind-up flashlight that doesn't require batteries.
- Camera (optional).
- Duct tape.

## Clothing

***Work Boots***

Your boots should have steel shanks (a metal strip in the sole) to give protection against bruising of the bottom of your foot. Many planters wear caulked boots (pronounced corks) in order to achieve a better grip on slippery logs and to enhance screefing capabilities – the process of disturbing the ground surface to prepare a spot for your seedling.

Boots can generally be divided into two types: rubber and leather (or waterproof and not waterproof). To increase your comfort level with all boots, you should use insoles (wash them regularly), wear two or more pairs of socks, and buy boots big enough so that two pairs of socks and insoles fit well. Boots should not be too tight or loose.

Leather work boots, once broken in, are generally quite comfortable. They will last a long time if you clean them regularly and put shoe-wax on them. Clean them every day off (wipe off mud, etc.). If you buy leather boots, you *really* should break them in before you go planting by wearing them around for a few weeks. If you don't, you might be sorry (blisters, and maybe a few non-productive days). Leather boots will not keep your feet dry in the rain (although you can wear a baggie or bread bag between layers of socks on each foot). If you can get them cheap, army surplus cadet boots (with steel toe and sole) also work well. Otherwise, buy CSA approved steel toe and steel shank work boots.

***A typical pair of leather boots.***

Leather hiking boots are one of the most comfortable types of footwear known to man. Once broken in, they are paradise for the feet. However, you may be doing some screefing with your feet, which will ruin many types of

hiking boots very quickly. More modern forms of hiking boot, such as GoreTex or day hikers, are useless. GoreTex loses its water resistance when it gets dirty. Fancy designs with multiple panels of leather, plastic components, etc. will wear out very quickly. I would usually advise against buying hiking boots for planting because they wear out too quickly (unless you want a pair for just lounging around camp and town). Hiking boots are great as town boots though, as long as you don't make the mistake of wearing them on the block for a shift and ruining them.

Rubber boots are great because they keep your feet dry, which is critical! There are several kinds of rubber boots available. Chainsaw boots are orange, with chainsaw matting (Kevlar) over the shin. These have steel toe and shank, and are fairly heavy. Some people recommend that you avoid this type of boot, but I've worn them for many, many seasons, and have been happy. They are especially great in Alberta mud. Chainsaw boots are often referred to as "caulks" (pronounced "corks") although technically the spikes on the bottom of the boots are the caulks, not the boots themselves. However, as I mentioned, these boots are quite heavy. It's nice to have them as one option for muddy days, but to also have a lighter boot that you can wear during good weather on faster ground. Caulks are best suited for work on the coast (where they're mandatory) or on steep or wet blocks, or blocks with a lot of slash. Their extra weight means that they're not as useful in flat, clean land.


*A pair of chain-saw boots, or "caulks"*

Lace-ups are a boot of choice for many BC planters. They're comfortable, easy to put on/take off, and available with or without caulks. The best kind seems to be the blue Viking brand. These boots are very popular, and they're priced quite reasonably, but you get what you pay for - these boots may not last a full spring and summer season. I've heard lots of complaints from planters who have torn these boots part-way through their first season. If you do buy lace-ups, don't forget to buy a couple pairs of extra laces. Rubber boots without laces, but with steel toe and shank, can also work well. They also last quite a while, and don't cost too much. However, the fact that they don't lace means you float around inside them, which is uncomfortable to some people.


***Another common type of caulked boot, the blue Viking lace-up.***

Plastic boots are also available, with a number of brand names such as Koflach, Kastingers, or Scarpas. These are almost like cut-off ski boots, and are light, warm, and fairly waterproof if worn with gaiters. The hefty price ($350-$400 or even much more) scares away many people, as it should. I wouldn't recommend these for first-year planters, although some high-production experienced planters may be better off with them, depending on personal preference. You can also have a pair resoled to take caulks, which makes them a great boot.

Boots are one item where planters have a lot of opinions. Here's one email that I got from a very good planter who did a lot of work in northern BC and Alberta: "A bunch of us on the crew last year bought some of the green Dunlop Rig boots (Thermic). They are relatively cheap, very light, steel toed and extremely durable. I destroyed about 3 pairs of expensive work boots each year (prior to last year) and these things have now lasted me a season and a half. Another guy here has had a pair that has lasted two seasons. They are painful for about two weeks until they are broken in. I have ankle issues and these things are an amazing help with that too. They are about $190 per pair before tax." Like caulks, the green Dunlops are fairly heavy, but very durable.

Some planters also wear what they call "mountaineering boots." From what I can understand, a mountaineering boot is a glorified, heavy-duty, work-oriented hiking boot. If this is the case, and the soles and leather are strong enough, then this kind of boot might be quite useful. Of course, you'll have to be careful when looking at these kind of boots, since there seems to be no straightforward way of differentiating hiking boots and mountaineering boots, except by checking out the quality yourself. This type of boot will probably be lighter than caulks or Dunlops, and might be suitable if you're working on very flat, clean ground.

Bottom line: Your boots are your most important overall investment in terms of work gear. The old adage, "You get what you pay for," is often correct. If a particular pair of boots seems like a great deal, there may be a reason for the low price. The Replant.ca message board has an entire sub-forum with dozens of separate discussions devoted specifically to planting footwear, although it's in the VIP section of the board, so you may only be able to see it if you register for an account: http://www.replant.ca/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=30


*A pair of "mountaineering boots," which are a heavy-duty hiking boot.*

***Caulks and Caulk Wrench***

Caulks (pronounced "corks") are little metal spikes which are found on the bottom of some boots. They are very useful if you are doing a lot of screefing with your feet, or if you are on steep, wet ground with a lot of slash, to prevent you from slipping on logs. I would most strongly recommend boots with caulks to every serious planter who can afford them, unless you're on very flat, clean ground. Bring a couple dozen extra caulks (about forty cents each) and a caulk-wrench to the bush with you, so you can replace caulks that eventually become worn down by mid-season. Also, make sure you carry a pair of hiking boots or runners for town use, because you'll get yelled at if you try wearing caulked boots into most gas stations, convenience stores, etc.


*A caulk wrench, sometimes called a "golfer's spike tool."*

***Rain Gear***

Rain gear is very important since planters work in both good and bad weather. A rain jacket and rain pants are both necessary. Investing a little extra in rain gear will pay off in the long run - it can be frustrating to miss a day of work because of sickness or cold that was exaggerated due to inadequate rain gear. Please watch this video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHdGHA-YpKY

My one regret with that video is that I didn't spend any time emphasizing the value and importance of wool. Wool is SO useful for keeping warm in the rain. Also, a wool scarf is pretty handy for keeping the back of your neck warm.

***Planters wearing various styles of rain gear, showing both pants and jackets.***

Bear in mind that when you are planting you cannot afford to hide in a warm truck when nature gets wet and nasty, no matter how appealing it is (I have worked for foremen who locked the trucks and held onto the keys during poor weather, to keep planters from sitting in the trucks). You have to continue to work, while trying to keep dry and warm. If you can't stay dry, you still need to stay warm. Planting is one way to keep warm – if there is a cold rain, you will soon learn that taking a break even for a couple minutes while bagging up really makes you cold, although you'll warm up again once you start working hard. Cotton clothes are cold when they get wet, so don't wear them in the rain. Here is a good rain gear system:

- Merino Wool under-layers are amazing. Look for these at places like Mark's Work Wearhouse. If you don't have Merino wool, another decent option is a shirt made of non-cotton materials such as polypro.

- Stanfields Underwear sells a wool sweater called the "Henley" brand. It's a gray, long-sleeved wool sweater that I swear by. Tons of coastal planters wear these. You can find them at Mark's Work Wearhouse. A Henley over top of a Merino wool under-layer is going to be as good as it gets.

- Add a wool scarf, to really keep yourself warm. Remember, you lose a disproportionate amount of heat from the back of your neck. If you can keep your neck warmer when there's cold rainwater running down it, your entire body will feel several degrees warmer.

- Reinforced rubber rain jacket and pants. The pants can have suspenders, or even better, a properly-fitting elastic waistband. The jacket should be tough, reinforced rubber. You may only use this gear when it rains very heavily, because in light or occasional rain you can plant wearing only a polypro shirt and pants, which will dry in minutes, or with the addition of the wool sweater for slightly heavier warm rain. Other good heavy rain gear is PVC. If you buy rain gear, make sure it's reinforced. Straight plastic or rubber will shred within minutes of you getting out on the block. Good rain gear can cost well over $100, but should last a couple seasons, and will keep you dry and warm. Some planters prefer to use a heavy rubber poncho over your other layers, since this system allows considerable freedom of movement.

I've had very good luck wearing rubber or caulked chainsaw boots, a pair of sweatpants or long underwear, and

a pair of black Coleman rain pants (with inside lining) from Canadian Tire. This will keep your bottom half happy – on top you can wear long sleeve shirt and wool sweater or fleece, and have an optional rain jacket for the heavy downpours. I don't use a really heavy thick rain-jacket, because I rely on my wool Henley to keep me warm if the temperature is really low, and if the temperature is warmer I won't even bother with the wool sweater.

Should you buy Gore-Tex type rain gear? Gore-Tex is the outdoor person's miracle substance. However, its efficiency when planting is not certain, because planting tends to get you dirty, and dirty GoreTex does not work as well. GoreTex is also vulnerable to tearing by snags, etc. If you are planting in the Interior, or anywhere where there's infrequent rain, you might be able to use it, but on the Coast, it's going to get shredded just like anything else. Balance purchases such as this against your budget. For the past several years of coastal planting, I've been using the mid-grade Helly Hansen rain gear, and it's treated me really well. You'll never find a better testing ground for rain gear than on the north Island – we sometimes only get half a dozen days without rain the entire spring coastal planting season.

Jon at Raven Studios agrees with some of the information above, but believes that conventional gear is tailored for "casual" work in the rain. For planters looking for a longer-term investment, or for those working on coastal projects, these comments he made might be of interest: "Polypro and Goretex are for hippies who want to look cool at Starbucks, not for working men in the bush. Let me give you the real scoop on outdoor work-wear: it is called 'wool.' Use wool for socks, underwear, shirts and sweaters, period. Virgin Wool is what you want, to be exact, which is full length fibers rather than clippings from the mill floor. This takes care of three things: (1) it is not itchy, (2) it does not "fuzz", matt up into little balls, or fall apart, and (3) it does not smell over time. Properly woven wool not only keeps you warm when wet, but also repels water rather than absorb it. It also breaths better during strenuous activity and lasts forever. The best rain gear is made from 100% cotton "tin-cloth" with an oil finish. If you want the best gear for working in the bush get "Filson" at www.filson.com. It costs a lot, but there is nothing better anywhere. But that is probably a moot point because tree planters tend to be smelly, patchouli-oil wearing, cheap-skate hippies and granola crunchers who don't care if they wear rotten smelly cloths that fall apart after one season." Well put, Jon!

***Work Pants***

Planting pants need to do two things: keep sun and branches off your legs, and keep the bugs out. A light, baggy pair of cotton pants (or cotton long johns worn with an old pair of shorts over top) works well in dry weather. Unless you invest in proper high-quality work pants (not necessary in your first year), your pants will probably get destroyed in two months, so don't spend a fortune on expensive army surplus pants. For hot and bug-free days, a ragged pair of thigh-length shorts is nice. Some planters even wear shorts almost constantly, however, when one sees the discomfort that they suffer with poor weather and/or bugs, and the multiple lacerations (which, when bleeding, attract the bugs even more), other people wonder about their general sanity. I've found some nice medium-quality work pants at CostCo & Walmart that many of my planters have found to be very useful. You probably only need to spend $30 to get a pair of work pants that will probably last for one season (although at that price, you should probably pick up a couple pairs). I managed to find a type at CostCo that have "zip-off" leggings so you can turn the pants into a decent pair of shorts on hot days. Professional planters working for coastal contractors will probably not be allowed to wear shorts. It's also a great idea to check out used clothing/thrift stores such as Value Village, Frenchy's, and the Salvation Army, to look for "disposable deals."

***Long Underwear/Sweat Pants***

When it is cold out, wearing long underwear or sweats under your work pants can help. These items are also very comfortable when worn under rain pants, usually much more so than regular work pants. Typical long underwear brands which are more form-fitting are probably a much better idea than sweatpants. Some people think they would be better off bringing sweatpants, because they can be worn in public, but you'll soon learn that when you're in the planting camp, seeing people wearing just long underwear is commonplace and not at all out of the ordinary (although people might stare if you wear long underwear by itself in town). Try to avoid cotton underwear, again because of the fact that it is cold when it gets wet. Also, be aware that your long underwear will almost always be wet – if not from rain

leaking in, from sweating.

***Belt***

If your work pants all fit you comfortably and you don't think you'll need a belt, bring one anyway. Within a month or so, you'll be at least two or three notches smaller, and you'll be annoyed because your pants will be falling down all the time. If you want to save money and not bother bringing a belt, you can always use a piece of rope as a substitute, although it gets annoying having to untie the rope every time you need to pee.

***T-Shirts, Long Sleeved Work Shirts***

You can get cheap cotton clothing at thrift stores. Mark's Work Wearhouse sells quality work-wear including pants, socks, and outerwear, although the prices are high. Some of the clothing mentioned above can be bought at MEC or other outdoor places, although again, be prepared to pay more. You would do well to look for deals, because your clothes will get dirty, abused, and destroyed in the bush. Don't load up on designer branded names at Eddie Bauer or J.Crew or L.L. Bean. Go with proper work clothing suppliers if you're looking for higher-priced items that are designed to last through very rugged conditions. If you want to save money and go with more disposable options, thrift stores are a great source. Nobody cares what you look like.

As far as shirts are concerned, bring a couple of ratty white T-shirts and a baggy white cotton turtleneck. The T-shirts keep you cool, while a turtleneck (or any long-sleeved baggy work shirt) is good for keeping the bugs away. A heavy jacket is also useful for cold mornings at the start of May. Cotton clothing is great when the weather is warm. But remember as I mentioned earlier that cotton is not good in cold rain. Diversify your clothing portfolio, so you have options. A great place to buy some really cheap "throwaway" t-shirts is Value Village. And you'll sometimes find amazing deals on really high-end clothing that people pass off.

***Fleece Sweatshirts***

Fleeces are somewhat bulky, and therefore not always the best items to wear while planting, except maybe when it is cool in early May. However, they are very useful in the morning on the way to the block (to keep warm), and sometimes after planting if the air is chilly. Fleeces are also popular in light rains, and to wear around camp in the evening.

***Socks and Underwear***

Socks are very important. Buy at least a dozen pairs of light polypropylene work socks, and a similar number of pairs of wool/nylon blend thick work socks. The light ones obviously go on first, with the wool on the outside. This setup keeps you from getting blisters, and these types of socks keep your feet dry when you sweat, and are warm when wet. Cotton socks are useless because they stay wet, and are cold when wet. When buying wool socks, try for an 80% wool and 20% nylon mix, which will last longer. Bama socks, or other types of polyethylene liners, are also excellent. A neat trick if you don't like wet feet is to put baggies or bread bags between your inner and outer socks. Eventually, your feet will still be wet from sweat, but at least this is a gradual process, so it isn't as painful and shocking as accidentally dumping your foot in a puddle.

I've had some pros tell me that compression socks are the way to go. They're more expensive, but are worth looking into if you have room in your budget. I haven't used them, but that's probably a mistake on my part, based on what I've been told.

*You can't see the Poly-Pro socks underneath, but here are a pair of Wool Socks.*

*A pair of bama socks, which are frequently used as boot liners.*

For regular underwear, bring whatever you're comfortable with.  Long underwear is discussed above.

***Hat***

The hat is an essential item. Without a sunhat, you are much more susceptible to getting a sun-burn, heat exhaustion, sunstroke, tired, and miserable. On rainy days, your hat doubles in function by keeping some of the water out of your eyes. If you wear glasses, a ball cap or Tilley hat is indispensable on rainy days. The best thing to use is a broad-brimmed cotton or canvas sunhat, which will keep the rain and sun out of your eyes and ears - baseball caps and bandannas are also acceptable. Keeping the sun out of your eyes reduces eyestrain and makes you less tired at the day's end - this is important because planting with sunglasses has proven repeatedly to be unfeasible (you can't see well into the holes that you are making). Do you ever see any photos of people planting while wearing sunglasses? There's a reason for that.

Another good reason for having a hat is to keep your hair out of your eyes while you're bending down to plant. If you have long hair, a hat or bandanna can be very helpful.

***A typical sun-hat, and a good example of how much shade it can provide you.***

***Gloves***

Planters who don't wear gloves sometimes get sore hands, and are hesitant about sticking their fingers into the shovel hole, because it can hurt. As a compromise, some planters wear duct tape on the fingers of their planting hand. However, it's hard to say what chemicals can be found in the glue on the duct tape. I don't recommend using duct tape anymore. Duct tape will NOT keep your hands warm if you're planting in snow.

If you decide to wear gloves, there are a couple brands that are especially popular. One brand I like using is the black Nitri-Dex gloves (you can get these at IRL, Motion Industries, and other suppliers). The ones that I use say "Nitri-Dex, 9/L CE 73376, Viking" on them. I'm going to make a video in late 2017 to talk about gloves in much more detail, and I'll update this document at the same time. I've become MUCH more of a fan of gloves in the past several years. It's amazing how often planters that bare-hand get infected cuts, and miss days of work. That's so short-sighted, because it's such an easy problem to prevent!


*Here's another similar type of light yet functional work glove.*

***Town Clothes & Boots***

You will definitely want one or two sets of town clothes (clean pants, nice shirt, clean jacket, etc.). I highly suggest that you wrap these garments securely in a couple layers of plastic, and then put them in some sort of pack where they are safe and dry. You should have a pair of town shoes or town boots – hiking boots are great, as long as you don't make the mistake of wearing them while planting and ruining them. Along with the town clothes that you wear around town, which might soon turn into your best "dress" outfit, you may want to have a second backup clean(ish) shirt and pair of sweats, so you have something to wear while doing your laundry and errands on the day off.

## Planting Gear

***Planting Bags***

To carry seedlings, the planter wears a set of planting bags. The number of pouches on this set of bags can vary, but it is almost always three pouches in recent years (although I'm a big fan of the four-baggers). Essentially, the bags serve as a storage area for the seedlings, so the planter can carry a large number of trees at a time. If you can carry a lot of trees, you won't have to go back to the cache as frequently to grab more.

When buying your bags, make sure that the waist belt fits comfortably and tightly, since it carries most of the weight. I believe that BushPro sells **a thick add-on waist belt** for their bags which I would recommend highly. If you buy used bags, make sure they aren't ripped or frayed, and make sure the buckles close and the belt and straps adjust properly (plastic clip-on buckles are preferable to thee much older cloth/stitched bags with metal clasps). New bags are around $80, while used bags (if available) will go for $40 to $50. Avoid stiff-bottomed (tray-bottom) bags. Make sure that the part of the side pouches that will rub against your thighs does not have seams and protruding material that will irritate your skin and ruin pants. If you want to consider a four-pouch set of bags instead of three-baggers, the cost is around $110. Not many Interior planters have caught on to these yet, although a lot of the professional planters on the coast use them. Their main intent was to make it easier to keep species separate when planting multi-species blocks, which isn't always relevant in the Interior, but I do find that the four-baggers have better weight distribution. Paying an

extra $30 for bags that are more comfortable is your call.  You'll be wearing them for about 70-80 days each season.

*A planter wearing a well-used set of "three-bagger" planting bags.*

***Shovel***

The shovel is the major tool in planting and should be comfortable to use.  The shovel should not be too long or too short.  If the shovel is not comfortable, it will hinder the planter's production.  There are three different types:

- The "D" handle is the most preferred handle used by planters in BC/Alberta.
- The straight handle (staff shovel) should be used by planters feeling tightness in the wrist caused by repetition (commonly known as tendonitis).  It is used in rocky ground to cope with the shock of striking a rock when making a tree hole.
- In 2004, the "modified D-handle" or "ergonomic D-handle" started to become popular.  These shovels were similar to the conventional D-handle, except that they tilted downward to the right, in an attempt to be more ergonomically correct and comfortable for planters.  However, they never really caught on.  I believe that they're still available, but I don't see many vets using them. I don't recommend using these shovels, because you can't plant ambidextrously with them.

There are also different blade types for shovels.  The most common of course is the standard tree planter shovel, which has a blade with a very slight curve, and is slightly tapered with a blade about four to five inches wide, and about a foot long.  Another type of blade is the spear, which is a narrower blade that is helpful when planting seedlings in rocky ground.  Spears are not very common.

There is a recurring debate among planters as to which kind of shovel (Staff vs. D-Handle) is better.  On the face of it, a D-handle is better.  It feels more natural than a staff.  The handle gives you leverage for twisting, and its length is more comfortable than the length of the staff.  It feels like a "normal" shovel.  In stores that sell planting gear, there are always far more D-handles to choose from than staff shovels (staves), leading many planters to think that the D is the way to go.  However, the D can theoretically lead to physical problems, such as tendonitis and bursitis.

*A planter using a staff shovel.*

Tendonitis (and bursitis, which is related) affect people who use certain muscle groups in repetitive ways. People who type, use adding machines or power tools, and tree planters are the largest affected groups. The tendon is a tissue that joins muscle to bone. The tendon is wrapped in a sheath of protective tissue. When a muscle is over-used in a repetitive way, the tendon can inflame the sheath by rubbing against it. This causes the sheath to swell, which results in the creaking sound and feel of tendonitis, swelling, pain, stiffness, and sometimes immobility of the affected part.

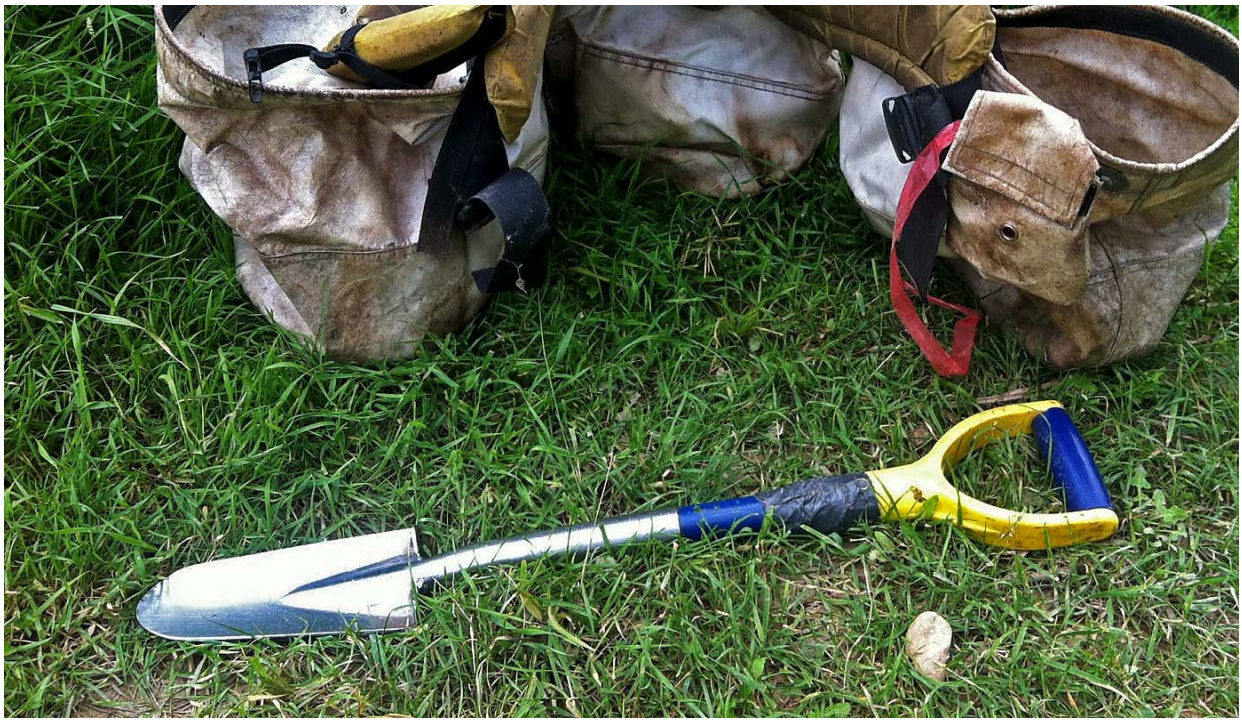
The treatment for acute inflammatory tendonitis is immobilization with support and moist heat (definitely not ice packs). This means that the planter who is severely affected can be out of work for days or weeks. If you think it would be great to go on Workers Compensation and spend the last six weeks of your planting season on a beach somewhere, think again. Tendonitis often leads to scarring, which has to be surgically removed, and which requires extensive physiotherapy to get you back up to speed. Some types of tendonitis of the knee and elbow can never fully recover.

If you lay your palm flat against the outside of your thigh, your entire arm is in what is known as the "anatomically neutral" position. This means that there is no stress or extension on any ligaments, muscle groups, or tendons in your arm. Now, if you turn your hand so that its palm lies flat on the front of your thigh, you are holding your hand OUT of the anatomically neutral position. This means that your tendons and muscles are extended.

Muscles and tendons are like any other material: they have a limited (though, in the long term variable) capacity to absorb and/or transmit stress. When you hold your hand so that it is out of anatomical position, you decrease the "slack" or excess absorptive capacity in your arm. This means that when you plant with a D-handled shovel, you are in effect overloading the tendons and muscles in your arm, because you are transmitting kinetic energy through your arm (from slamming the shovel into the ground) and through muscles and tendons that are already extended. Imagine something like a climbing rope, rubber band, or bike tire. When these materials are not stretched out, or only partially stretched, they have a large capacity to absorb shock. However, when they are stretched taut, the same amount of force can tear or puncture them. Your muscles work in a roughly similar way. A staff shovel helps by making you use your arm in an anatomically neutral position because of the way that you hold the staff, not like a D-handle which is at a ninety-degree angle to neutral position. This means that you will transmit stress through your muscles and tendons which are not in an extended position. A staff also allows your hand to slide along the shaft when the shovel hits the

ground (especially when you hit rocks), whereas a D-handle transmits that energy directly into your arm, which hurts and causes damage over time.

Having said all that, I have to say that I prefer D-handles, and so do the vast majority of planters in our industry. The staff shovel is theoretically better for you in a medical/ergonomic sense, but only a very, very small number of planters use them in BC/Alberta. There is also a good argument that the lighter weight of a D handle will lead to less wear and tear on your arm.



*A "D-handle" shovel.*

Planting shovels come pre-made in standard configurations, however, some planters modify their shovels by having a metal shop or hardware store change the shape of the blade. You can shorten a blade, change its shape, and saw off one of the kickers. Many planters also shorten the shaft eventually. Rookies should not bother with these procedures, at least not at the start of the season.

As for shortening the shovel blade, don't cut it down too much! I've occasionally had planters get pulled off the block by checkers because their blades did not meet the contract's minimum length specifications (and because most checkers figure that a shorter blade leads to j-roots, a theory which does have some merit). I've also known planters who have shaved down their blade, and afterwards, lament because they shaved too much off and they wished it was still a little bit longer. I really discourage beginning planters from shortening their shovel blades. Remember that the blades wear down fairly significantly over the course of a season.

The trend over the past decade has been toward shorter shovels. Many people used to use D-handles that were a full meter long. Nowadays, many people favor a much shorter shovel (70-80 centimeters) because it is lighter to carry. That makes sense. My only suggestion is not to shorten your shaft right away if you're not an experienced planter, because if you cut it too short, you can't make it longer again. After you've had a couple weeks of practice with a regular-length shovel, ask your crew boss if you can borrow a shorter shovel for the day. By then, you'll be able to make a useful personal evaluation and hopefully you'll be able to figure out what shovel length is best for you. If your company works on challenging ground, you might find that a longer shovel is helpful for shovel screefing. You might also find it's useful to buy a backup shovel and keep one of your shovels at regular length and one at a short length, so you can switch back and forth depending on the type of ground you're working on.

***Silvicool Inserts***

Insert bags are used in the planting bags to protect the seedling from heating up. They are made out of reflective material and must be closed at the top when full of trees, with the exception of your feeder bag/drawbag (the one currently in use). Most Interior contracts specify that you must use your inserts, even when it is raining. Most coastal contracts do not require the use of inserts. Typically, your drawbag may have an insert with the top rolled back, for easy access to your loose trees, and the other two pouches will contain inserts with the drawstrings closed.

Some planters also use an extra insert to carry their lunch and/or water, to keep it cool. You can see some brand-new inserts in use, if you look back up at the photo of the person wearing a set of planting bags.

***Silvicool Tarp***

These tarps, which should be supplied by your company, are made from reflective material and are used to cover your individual box or boxes of trees on the block. Boxes must be covered as specified at the pre-work conference. Rocks or logs can be used to keep the tarp from blowing off the box. A box of trees exposed to sunlight may result in a penalty to you or your crew. Note that the spring and summer seasons, because of differences in the ways that trees are delivered to the contractor, have different specifications for tarping. Spring trees (over-wintered) are usually required to be completed covered and tucked in on all sides. Summer trees (hot-lifted) are usually required to have a tarp suspended in an A-frame style cache, to allow for air flow and to keep sunlight off all parts of all boxes. Within the cache, the boxes themselves must be opened, watered, and all trees standing up within the boxes. Your foreman will probably set up your cache for you at the start of the day, but the planter is the one who is expected to make sure the tarp is covering the boxes properly throughout the day. Don't walk away from your cache without taking a look back to double-check that the tarp looks good. If your company expects you to buy your own cache tarp, you should switch to a different company.

***A silvicool tarp on an A-Frame cache.***

***Plot cord***

A plot cord is an essential piece of planting equipment. Planters should not be allowed to plant without one. The only way a planter can maintain proper spacing in the long term is by using the plot cord. This cord is 3.99 meters long and is made of rope, wire, chain, etc. (preferably clothesline). I use a plot cord all the time when I plant, and usually try to throw a plot on myself at least after every second run, just to double-check my own density. Some planters are reluctant to throw plots on themselves, but think about it – it takes you about one minute at the very most to throw a plot or two as you're walking back to the cache, and if you catch spacing problems before they get out of control, you can save yourself hours of replanting. I'm just amazed that some experienced planters practically refuse to throw plots on themselves – many of the best planters I've known (production-wise, not just quality-wise) have not allowed this form of hubris to get in the way of the job. Most professional experienced planters are smart enough to throw a couple quick density plots on themselves each day. Be careful that you don't buy a spacing plot cord, which is 5.64 meters long. It can still work, but just be aware that it covers exactly twice as much surface area, and therefore you can expect to get twice as many trees in it as expected.

***A box of plot cords on the hood of a truck.***

***Water Jug***

A water container is indispensable. You can drink as much as ten litres of water (or more) on hot days. Although it is possible to buy fairly inexpensive coolers (about $20) which hold a gallon and keep it moderately cool, planters could also consider bringing several old two-litre plastic pop bottles. Another great option is the strong clear plastic 3.78 litre juice jugs that cranberry juice and similar juices come in. These are universally available, and very strong, to withstand bouncing around in the back of the truck. The only drawback with these is that once one of these is empty, someone else on the crew might throw it in the garbage, so put your name on it. Another very good option is to ask the cook to set aside a couple of empty milk jugs for you from the kitchen. These hold a decent amount of water, and are pretty durable. You can take two or three of these jugs full of water to the block with you, and if you have to walk a distance into a block, they fit easily into the pouches in your planting bags. Planters should ALWAYS be aware of how much water they bring to the block. Although your foreman will try to get you more water if you run out during the day, it is often impossible to magically come up with more fresh, clean water when on the block. And if the rest of the

crew is depending on the presence of the foreman to ensure that planting proceeds smoothly, he/she often cannot afford an hour long trip to camp to get more. ALWAYS take more than you think you can use. Also, try not to pour out extra water at the end of the day, just because you want to make your gear lighter on the walk out of the block. Remember, the planting camps often have to pay to have potable water hauled in, or have to send trucks to town to refill barrels, which is a real hassle. Every little bit of conservation of water helps, just don't ever skimp on drinking lots of water on the block for the sake of conservation. Finally, do NOT buy a red jerry can to use as a water bottle – these should be reserved for fuel purposes only.

*A planter drinking from one of her 4-litre water jugs.*

***Flagging Tape***

Ribbon or flagging tape is used by planters to mark boundaries and is carried either in a pouch, in the planting bag, or in the planter's pocket. There are tons of colors available, and your company should supply this. Besides getting ribbon in a solid color, you can also get "tiger-stripe" ribbon, which is stripes of two alternating colors (usually black or white is one of the two colors). I have often been asked why flagging tape is made of plastic, which is not exactly biodegradable, and why someone doesn't produce biodegradable ribbon. Well, biodegradable ribbon IS available, although it is a lot more expensive, which is why most people don't use it. Biodegradable ribbon usually disintegrates completely after just a year or so, whereas normal ribbon usually becomes frayed and disappears after quite a few years, but probably doesn't really break down in an environmental sense. Planters prefer to use "summer weight" ribbon (much thinner) rather than winter weight, because it's easier to rip pieces off the roll quickly. It's cheaper, it's slightly less bad for the environment, and you'll end up with more length on the roll. Your company will usually provide all the flagging tape that you need, within reason, but of course since you're literally throwing plastic garbage all over the blocks when you use it, try to minimize its use. About 97% of planters prefer to use blue flagging tape.

***Several rolls of flagging tape, also known as "ribbon".***

***Where to Buy Gear***

Camping gear can be bought pretty much anywhere. You can get stuff very cheaply at Canadian Tire, K-Mart, etc. For better camping equipment, there are some upscale places around. Many planters will debate whether it is smarter to invest money in high-end tents, or to just buy cheaper ones and replace them more frequently during your career. The choice is yours.

If you are in Prince George, and buying any type of planting gear, your very first stop will probably have to be at IRL. If you're going north on the Hart Highway, just after you go over the bridge (by the brewery) and before you go over the overpass, you'll see IRL down to the right. Their toll-free phone number is 1-800-663-6843, and they have a website at www.irlsupplies.com. Another slightly cheaper source is Motion Industries, just south of the bridge that goes over the Fraser on highway 97, and one street over.

In Vancouver, you can visit Neville Crosby International (BushPro no longer has a retail store, but Neville Crosby is a BushPro dealer). Neville-Crosby is located at 443 Terminal Avenue, Vancouver, about a five minute walk from the bus station. Their toll-free number is 1-800-663-6733.

In Edmonton, the main forestry supplier is Canadian Forestry Equipment at 780-484-6687, and their order number is 1-800-661-7959. At one point, they were located at 16532 111th Ave NW, but you should call first to make sure that's the correct address.

The BushPro website can be found here: http://www.bushpro.ca – they make all kinds of planting gear (I use BushPro bags)

## Toiletries and Medicinal

### *The Basics*

The basic toiletries that you bring should include anything that you might bring to a cottage for an overnight trip in the summer – soap, shampoo, towel, deodorant, hair brush or comb, razor, and tampons. You should also bring some of the things that might not be used on an overnight trip, but which would come in handy eventually – fingernail clippers, q-tips, etc. Some people suggest bringing band-aids. That is probably a good idea, in case you get a significant cut that you want to cover at night, or any time you're around food/kitchen/people. An alternative at night is to keep it exposed (exposure to air helps a cut to heal much faster), but then to put a band-aid (and duct tape over the band-aid to keep it in place) over the cut during the day, while planting, so you don't get a lot of dirt to get into the cut. However, you will probably find that you don't want to bother using band-aids on ninety percent of your cuts.

I highly, highly recommend that you buy a canister of handi-wipes for your tent, to keep your cuts as clean as possible at night. Wash them frequently, in the morning and the evening, to prevent infection. It seems like at least ten percent of my planters miss days of work each season because of simple preventable infections in their hands or fingers. That's an expensive mistake to make! Keep it clean, so it's less likely to become infected.

### *Makeup*

Ladies, you probably should not bring much makeup. You will definitely not need it in the bush, and might even be laughed at if you wear makeup in camp during the shift. Some women do bring some very basic makeup for nights off in town. Remember though, that planters are a very down-to-earth sort of group. If you want to get all "dolled-up," go ahead, but you may feel out of place. Many people who go tree planting are not the type to do that. If you're the sort of female who is thinking right now, "Of course I'll wear make-up in camp," then you probably should not be a tree planter.

### *Hand Cream/Moisturizer*

Think about inserting your hand into the ground, a couple thousand times a day. Your skin will dry out and crack, and your hand will hurt. Wearing gloves will help, but some people don't like to wear gloves. If you don't wear gloves, you're going to get a lot of cuts and scrapes, which is why I really advise that all planters wear light work gloves. Either way, a liberal application of hand cream every night will make your hands feel a lot better over time. In my early days of planting, everyone said, "make sure you get vitamin E hand cream." It definitely seems to help your hands stay healthy. Wrap it in a towel during camp moves, so it doesn't somehow get squished and explode everywhere in your duffle bag.


***One commonly available brand of hand cream.***

***Sun Screen***

You *will* get sunburned. If you're lucky, it will happen in stages, and you won't blister badly. Remember that you'll be planting in the mountains at significantly higher elevations than you're used to. The air is thinner, and the sun's radiation is stronger. You can burn quite quickly, even on freezing cold days in early May. Once you've been planting for a month, you'll probably go without sun screen, and revel in the sunshine (until it gets really hot). Planters can often be seen planting without shirts even in late April, if the weather is even minimally nice, because you generate so much body heating while planting. My suggestion is to bring out one bottle of sunscreen – by the time you've used that up, you've probably built a good base so you aren't as likely to turn the color of a cooked lobster. For the first week you're planting, make sure you put sunscreen on the tips of your ears, even if the weather is cold. The tops of your ears are always the first part of your body to burn and blister. Don't buy weak sunscreen – get SPF 15 at the bare minimum.

***Solarcaine***

Even if you follow the advice in the above paragraph, you may end up with a solid sunburn at least once near the start of the season. If that's the case, solarcaine is worth its weight in gold. Liberal applications of this stuff every four hours for two days can really minimize the effects of a bad burn. Don't leave home without it.

***Fingernail Clippers***

The need for these is pretty self-explanatory. However, a bit of advice – don't cut your nails short. Always cut them down so they're still a few millimeters longer than you would in the city. You will always want to keep a slight fingernail, to help protect the tips of your fingers (since you're always digging in the dirt). Fingernail clippers serve a double function, since they are also very useful for digging thorns out of your hands.

***Vaseline, Lip Balm, Zincofax/Penaten***

When planting, you get dehydrated. Between this, and the sun on your face, your lips will inevitably become very dry, and may become chapped and sunburned. In extreme cases (not uncommon), your lips may even split and bleed. Applying some sort of lip balm every day will help, and make eating less painful.

***Vitamin Supplements (optional)***

Tree planters burn a lot of energy. While a normal adult may only require from 1200 to 2400 calories per day to function normally over the long term, planters may need anywhere from 4000 to 6000 calories per day, or even more. If you're going planting to lose weight (which is not a good reason to go planting), do NOT diet intentionally – you will become a health/safety risk because of poor nutrition. Trust me – you can eat very well and eat large quantities if you are planting hard, and you will still lose weight. Many planters lose between ten and thirty pounds in their first six to eight weeks of planting. Anyway, the point of this is that it is an accepted fact that planters need to eat large quantities of proper, healthy foods, in order to remain in peak productive shape. Because of this, the cooks usually supply a very balanced diet, and in very generous portions.

You are almost certainly going to get all the vitamins and minerals you need from eating the regular fare that the cooks provide. However, having said this, I still bring up the option of taking vitamin supplements. To be honest, I'm not yet convinced that this is a good idea. I've always been of the mind that if you eat a balanced diet, you don't need to take supplements. However, when you're planting, your body is working double-overtime and really pushing itself to the limits, so I concede that it probably can't hurt to be augment your vitamin intake slightly.

I certainly think that your intake of fluids and salts (sodium, magnesium, potassium, etc.) is especially important to be aware of. Drinking water sweetened with sugar and juice crystals probably isn't the best approach, but drinking a lot of water IS important. Personally, if I'm planting, I will sometimes make weak Gatorade from powder (purchased at Costco), although that is mostly designed to make my day more interesting, not due to the health aspects. I figure that the salts and other stuff in Gatorade are just a nice bonus, and are better for me than pop or sugared juices.

***Medicine for Heartburn (optional)***

If you ever suffer from heartburn or indigestion, it might be smart to bring some Zantac, which is much better than Tums or other antacids. Of course, you can buy a cheaper generic equivalent. If you eat a big breakfast, you may end up getting indigestion while you are planting in the morning, both because of having a full stomach, and also because you keep bending over all morning. The drawback of things like Tums is that they partially neutralize the acids in your stomach, which means that you end up digesting your food more slowly. Another problem will happen in the evening, if you end up eating several plates of dinner (very common) and then try to go to bed an hour later. If your stomach doesn't have time to digest the food before you go to bed, you may start to suffer. Of course, rather than staying up late to allow yourself time to digest a huge meal, it may be better to consider trying to eat more throughout the day. Rather than completely binging at breakfast and supper, carry a big lunch with you on the block that you can work away at in small pieces frequently throughout the day. This also gives you a more constant supply of energy.

***Heat Rub (optional)***

I've never used heat rub products such as A5-35, and I don't know if they are that useful. Certainly, I don't think they are extremely common in planting camps, although some people do use them. The problem with these products, I think, is that they are more designed for specific sort muscles. In planting, your entire body will be aching for a while until you really get into the season, and heat rubs may not be a decent solution. Some people prefer to use an "internal" solution to their aches and pains, like a can of beer and a muscle relaxant before bed. I think some of these "solutions" probably offer more psychological help than physical assistance, but if it makes you happy, go for it. Don't overdo it though. Even small amounts of alcohol in your bloodstream lessens the effectiveness of your sleep, and over-the-counter drugs are hard on your kidneys and liver, which are already under a lot of pressure while planting.

***Tylenol/Aspirin, Muscle Relaxants (optional)***

Pain relievers and muscle relaxants are certainly recommended by some planters. If you need this sort of help to keep you planting, then do whatever it takes. However, remember that in the end it is your body that makes the decision about whether or not you can handle the physical aspects of being a highballer, and the drugs often don't make any difference except for psychological. If you can do it with the chemical help, then you can certainly also do without, if you put your mind to it.

***Antihistamines***

I cannot say enough good things about antihistamines. If you know that you occasionally suffer from allergies, bring these in quantity. If you have acute attacks of hay-fever, you may want to look for another job. The amount of pollens that you come in contact with while working in the bush can be phenomenally higher than what you'll encounter in the city, so be aware. You should know that taking antihistamines whenever you have an attack is not the smart way to approach the situation. If you do that, you'll still potentially have a couple of hours of downtime while your body recover from red eyes, sneezing, or even puffed-up eyeballs and inability to breathe clearly in more acute cases. If you are even slightly worried about allergies, your best bet is to buy a lot of antihistamines and start a regular daily regimen about two days before you go into the bush, and keep it up throughout the season. Your body takes a few days to become fully prepared (internally) once you start taking the pills, so if you start acting in a preventative manner from the start, and have extra drugs on hand for the occasions when you are working in extreme conditions, then you'll probably be alright.

## Miscellaneous

***Tent***

If you are hesitant to spend a lot of money on an expensive high-end tent, go ahead and buy one from Canadian Tire. Just be aware, however, that you will probably end up throwing it out at the end of the season. Also, if you are sleeping alone, you will probably want to buy a two-person or three-person tent. If you're sharing, you will probably want a four-man tent.

***Sleeping Bag***

One of my strongest recommendations in terms of buying gear is that if you're going to splurge anywhere, spend extra money and get a good sleeping bag. My parents bought me a top quality sleeping bag when I started planting. I finally had to throw it away fourteen years later because it was getting too ripped. That sleeping bag lasted me through all those seasons, and it helped keep me warm on some painfully freezing nights. Don't get me wrong – I

consider myself to be very “thermodynamic” and enjoy cold temperatures, but I can’t imagine how cold I would have been if I had just owned a normal sleeping bag. Make sure that the bag you buy is good to twenty degrees below freezing. Make sure that it is machine-washable. “Mummy bags” are designed to be narrower and tighter, and the heat that they trap therefore has to warm a smaller area, so they are said to be better for the single person. However, if you are not sleeping alone, buy a normal square or rectangular sleeping bag, or get extra fancy and buy two bags that are exactly the same, so you can open them up face-to-face and zip them up to each other, to form one huge sleeping bag. Find a laundromat with a double-loader and wash your sleeping bag at the start of each successive season when temperatures are lowest, because a clean bag does a slightly better job of insulating you. You might want to wash it a couple times per season too, just so it is clean and fresh.

***Foamie***

A “foamie” is a large foam mattress, which is usually either three or four inches in thickness, which you should lie on the floor of your tent to sleep on. Foamies are pretty cheap, usually less than $50 each, and many planters prefer them to air mattresses. The only real drawback of a foamie is that it is bulky during a camp move or when you’re travelling.

An inflatable air mattress is another viable option. The big advantage of an inflatable mattress is that it can be compacted for camp moves by letting the air out. However, many people find that their air mattresses eventually get punctured and become useless. Also, at night, when the temperature drops, the air compacts, and you’ll sometimes wake up in the middle of the night to find that your mattress feels half deflated.

***Kit Bag or Packsack – Referred to as a Day Bag***

A day bag is also essential for carrying all of your little treasures: duct-tape, boxtops, lunch, Tylenol, a knife, suntan lotion, extra flagging tape, a thermos, etc. And here’s a tip for using a thermos: pre-heat it by leaving a bit of hot water in it for two minutes. Dump this out and then add your coffee/tea/whatever. This can make a huge difference in keeping your beverages hot until supper instead of just until lunch. Just be careful that if your lunch is in your day bag, it is zipped up. If dogs are permitted on the block, they will sometimes raid planters’ lunches when nobody is looking. Interestingly, I’ve watched crows and ravens pull open zippers on backpacks to get at the lunches inside. They’re incredibly smart. After being treated to a lunch in a half-open backpack, they’ll go around opening other day bags to look for more treats. Here’s a video to give you more info about a day-bag, although my day-bag is larger than what I would recommend for most planters: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpZI39BbffM

A dry-bag is an especially wise choice for a day bag, because it’s waterproof. A cheap dry-bag can be purchased from MEC, Amazon, or other retailers for $50 or less, and it’ll help guarantee that you have access to dry food, clothing, and other supplies even on the most miserable of rain days.

*A conventional kit bag, or knapsack, to carry supplies and lunch to the block.*

***Insect Repellent***

The best way to deal with bugs is with clothing. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and maybe a bug hat. DEET is evil and deadly stuff, and is an important ingredient in almost all bug repellents. Most spray type repellents only contain 15-30% DEET, whereas the little containers of liquid that you rub on your skin are generally 75% to 95% DEET. Muskol and Deep Woods Off in liquid form are 95% DEET, and the most effective repellents, but are becoming increasingly hard to find. I wonder if they are not permitted to be sold in Canada anymore, or if the retailers just prefer to sell the aerosol form. I swear by DEET, have used it in mass quantities for years, and would certainly suffer without it, but then again, the downside is that I'll probably have mutant children someday due to the chemicals that my body has absorbed from these bug sprays. DEET can cause severe allergic reactions in some people, and in others it simply burns the skin. DEET has also been known to melt plastic and parts of your planting equipment. Some people say that Skin So Soft and Citronella are effective. They're wrong. Besides, if you use those products, you'll smell so good that you'll have bears and bumble-bees chasing after you all day (ok, maybe that's an exaggeration).


***Spray cans of "Deep Woods Off" insect repellent, which is a popular brand.***

The biggest problem with bugs is mental. Bugs can be just incredible if it is your first time in the woods, especially when you go further north. You can look up and see so many bugs directly above you that they look thicker than stars in the sky when you're out on the ocean. At the right time of year, you can look at a planter standing still on a landing and count literally hundreds of mosquitoes on their back, especially if they are wearing dark clothing. Some people are bothered more by the incessant buzzing than by the actual bites. Every person deals with them differently, though most just use lots of DEET, long clothing, and try to ignore the noise. People who have planted in Ontario tell horror stories about the bugs there. It seems that northern Ontario is usually far, far worse than western Canada. My worst experiences have been up north, near Fort Nelson (BC) and Vermillion (Alberta).

Bees, wasps, and hornets do not seem to be affected or deterred by insect repellent. They just fly around and ignore it. If you disturb their nest, they are going to come after you with a vengeance, although if you can move away several meters, they may abandon pursuit. Their stings are painful and may cause an allergic reaction. There are sting treatment kits available (anti-histamines and epi-pen needles for extreme circumstances), but since repellents don't work, the best approach is caution. If you disturb a nest, jump back. If you know that you have allergies to these insects, or are ever stung in the neck, notify your first aid attendant right away, just to be safe (swelling can constrict breathing).

Black flies, mosquitoes, and no-see-ums, are deterred by repellents containing DEET. If you do get bitten by these insects, the bites can cause irritation, and multiple bites may even cause swelling, especially around the eyes and lips. Inhaling these insects is fairly common, and feels kind of strange and uncomfortable. Get used to the feeling – it happens occasionally, no matter what you do. If you don't like using repellent, wear pants and long-sleeved clothing.

Deer flies and horse flies do not seem to be deterrent by insect repellents. They go for bare flesh, probably not so much because they are seeking it with a vengeance, but because they happen to land on you. If they do (and this happens frequently if you are planting without a shirt when it is hot in July and August), then they may bite you if given the opportunity. The bites can be surprisingly painful. House flies are a small cousin of the deer and house flies, and are also not deterred by repellents, but at least house flies don't bite. The only drawbacks to having house flies around is

the buzzing noise, which seems to annoy some planters, and the fact that they transfer diseases fairly readily since they like to land and feast on the feces of various animals.

Ticks are apparently deterred by DEET-based insect repellent. I don't know a lot about ticks, since I haven't encountered them frequently while planting. However, they are a very common problem in bush areas on the east coast of Canada. I'm not sure why we don't run into them more often while planting. If you are attacked by a tick, don't try to remove it by prying or pulling it off – use heat (a burning match) to make it release its grip.

***Battery Powered Coleman Lantern (optional)***

A flashlight is more of a priority than a lantern, but if you insist on reading at night to put you to sleep, a battery powered lantern is a wise investment. Whatever you do, don't have fires in your tent. Using a candle or open flame to read by is an incredibly bad idea. Most tents are labeled as being "flame retardant" or "flame resistant," but I have seen tents that can go up in flames in twenty to thirty seconds. Don't take a chance on burning yourself.

***A battery-powered lantern.***

***Alarm clock (or two)***

If you are the type that likes to read at night, and consequently likes to sleep as late as possible every morning, you'll want a couple of alarm clocks. In the old days, we used to honk the truck horns in the mornings to wake everyone up, or fire the rifle at 6am on critical days. These days, planters are more work-oriented (in my crews, at least) and don't usually need assistance in getting up in the morning. Therefore, you'll have to make sure that you have a decent alarm clock. It would really suck to miss a day of work, and lose a couple hundred dollars, because your tent was far from camp and you slept in an extra hour. Having said that, the camps should also have a roll call system in the mornings, so that if someone is not accounted for within fifteen minutes of when the trucks are about to head to the block, someone goes to check on their tents to see if they just slept late, or if the employee is sick or has been eaten by a bear during the night. Some planters use their cell phones as alarm clocks, but the camps have limited power on the generators, and sometimes it can be very hard to keep a cell phone charged when thirty people want to charge their phones at the same time. Don't assume that you'll be able to recharge phones reliably. Wind-up alarms are the safest fall-back.

***Flashlight***

Having a flashlight is useful for general purposes, such as rummaging around in your tent after dark. However, you'll find that a good flashlight is worth its weight in gold the first time that you wake up at 2am and you have to go to the outhouses in pitch darkness. Just remember to bring batteries. By the way, you should remember to bring extra batteries for everything that you own. May is especially harsh on batteries, since the cold temperatures seem to drain some batteries a lot faster. I don't understand why this happens, since I thought electricity travels more efficiently when there is less heat present. Anyway, deal with it, and bring extra batteries for your flashlight and alarm clocks and vibrators and other goodies. LED flashlights tend to last a lot longer before you need to replace the batteries.

***Camera (optional)***

A camera is very nice to have. However, many people are disappointed with the pictures that they take, because it is tough to take really good pictures in the bush, for several reasons. For one, you are better off having a good camera. However, unless you have money to burn, you should not bring a good camera to the bush, because you will destroy it. For example, speaking in my extensive experience as a photographer, no matter how carefully you take care of your equipment, I find that an auto-focus type of 35mm lens will not last more than two seasons. It will get dirty, and it will no longer auto-focus. Dirt gets into every part of your equipment, no matter how careful you are. You can wrap your camera up in three layers of clothing and plastic, and only use it on sunny days, but you will still look at it in October when you get accustomed to city life and wonder how it got so much dirt on it. If you take the smart route and buy less expensive equipment, the quality of your photos will suffer. Also, you will not want to be out taking photos when you can be planting and making the big bucks.

Your best bet, if you have a phone with a good camera, is to use that. Keep your phone protected by purchasing a nice Otter case for it. I think that at least 8-10 planters in my camps destroy their phones each season. You may even want to use a $99 special for the summer, if you have a really nice phone, and leave the good phone at home to start using again in August.

***Duct tape***

This is a special type of tape, usually a silvery-grey (although many other colors are now available). This tape is wide and sticky, and is exactly the right kind of tape to be useful to planters for dozens of reasons. Duct tape is a good general purpose fix-it material. Just remember that it is spelled "duct" as in air-conditioning ductwork, not "duck" as in the bird. There are dozens of types of duct tape available, and experienced planters can often tell you about the pros and cons of different brands (stickiness to the fingers, ease of ripping off the roll, etc.). In my opinion, the brand that Home Hardware sells is pretty much the best, and as a bonus Home Hardware's brand comes in a variety of colours. It might cost an extra dollar or two to get coloured duct tape from HH, but at least it will be easier to tell who owns the roll.

## Conclusions

If you have any suggestions or additions to the above information, please send an email to jonathan.scooter.clark@gmail.com or post feedback in the appropriate thread of the training forum on the Replant Message Boards at www.replant.ca/board

Also, please feel free to print this page and pass the information along to other potential planters, and let them know the link to www.replant.ca

- Jonathan "Scooter" Clark