



Ready to Go Packing Guide

Follow this guide to build your kit. Check each box as you pack, fill in the planning tables, then use the inventory sheets at the back — one per container — to record exactly what you packed.

Layer 1: The Rollaway Tote

Why a wheeled tote: because you can roll it straight to your vehicle, it carries the heavy and bulky things a backpack can't — and the sentimental things you would grieve to lose. Choose a sturdy, lidded container on good wheels. Keep it packed in a staging spot all season; when the season ends, the same bin carries everything back to the shelf.

Documents — digital and physical

Make two forms of every critical record so a single soaked or burned binder doesn't wipe you out.

- Flash drive or portable hard drive with scanned tax documents, deeds, titles, and insurance policies
- Waterproof binder with original physical documents (birth/marriage certificates, passports, Social Security cards)
- Insurance policy numbers and agent contact info, written on paper
- List of bank/credit accounts and key phone numbers (not full numbers — just enough to call and verify)
- Copies of medical records, immunization records, and current prescriptions

Sentimental and irreplaceable items

These are the things insurance can never replace. Pack the items you would reach back into a burning house for — calmly, now, while there is time.

- Photo albums and loose family photos (or a drive with scans of them)
- Children's baby books and keepsakes
- Hard-copy memorabilia, letters, and small heirlooms
- Souvenirs and irreplaceable mementos that matter to your family

Heavy utility gear

- Small toolkit and a multipurpose knife or multi-tool
- Heavy-duty work gloves
- Dust masks (N95 if possible) and duct tape
- Headlamp or flashlight with spare batteries

Shelter and comfort

- Tarps and a compact tent
- Sleeping bags and extra blankets
- Camping gear you already own (stove, lantern, ground pads)
- A few comfort items for kids — a familiar toy or two makes a hard night easier

Layer 2: Personal Go-Bags — The Five P's

Every person in the home gets their own backpack, sized to what they actually need. An easy way to remember what goes inside is the Five P's. Pack the things you won't reach for during the season anyway: out-of-season clothing (no winter coats in July), a spare pair of sturdy shoes, duplicate toiletries, and items that are expensive or slow to replace. Day-to-day essentials stay on the Last-Minute Grab List instead.

People & Pets

- Three days of non-perishable food per person
- Water — one gallon per person, per day
- Pet food, collapsible bowls, leashes, and a carrier
- Pet vaccination records and a current photo of each pet (in case you're separated)
- Comfort and calming items for anxious pets

Prescriptions

Medication note: *Keep a small written list of every medication, its dose, and the prescribing provider, plus your pharmacy's phone number. Rotate the packed supply so it never expires, and refresh it when you pack out at season's end. If a medication must stay refrigerated or can't be duplicated, note it on your Last-Minute Grab List instead so you don't forget it in the rush.*

- Seven-day supply of daily medications
- Spare glasses and/or contact lenses with solution
- Copies of the actual prescriptions
- A small first-aid kit

Papers

- Copies of IDs and driver's licenses
- Medical info and insurance cards
- Proof of address (a utility bill works)
- Extra cash in small bills — power and card readers may be down

Personal Needs

- Complete change of clothes, weather-appropriate

- Sturdy, closed-toe shoes — ash, glass, and floodwater are hard on bare feet
- Toiletries: toothbrush, soap, hand sanitizer, feminine supplies
- Sleep mask and earplugs (shelters and hotels are rarely quiet)
- Reusable water bottle

Priceless / Quick-Grab

- Spare set of car keys
- Personal electronics and a charging cable
- Portable battery pack / power bank
- Small family heirlooms light enough to carry

Layer 3: The Last-Minute Grab List

Some things can't be pre-packed because you use them every day. Write them on a single sheet and tape it by the door (and a copy on the tote lid). When the call comes, one person reads the list aloud while everyone sweeps. This is what prevents the heartbreak of driving away without the laptop, the medication, or the dog.

Grab on the way out

- Phones and the day's charging cables
- Laptop / tablet and its charger
- Today's medications and anything refrigerated or single-supply
- Wallet, purse, and the cash envelope
- Pets, leashes, and carriers — do a headcount
- Car keys and house keys
- Glasses you're wearing / hearing aids
- The rollaway tote and every go-bag (final check that they're in the vehicle)

Cleanup & Recovery Gear

If you return to a damaged home, the first days are about making it safe and salvaging what you can. Keep these in the tote or the vehicle so you're not scrambling for them when stores are closed or sold out.

- Sturdy shovel and a push broom
- Heavy-duty work gloves and rubber boots
- Contractor-grade trash bags and a tarp or two
- N95 dust masks — ash, mold, and demolition debris are hazards
- Duct tape, zip ties, and a basic tool set
- Headlamp and extra batteries (hands-free is better than a flashlight here)
- Disinfecting wipes, bleach, and a bucket
- Phone or camera for documenting damage before you clean up

Your Master Packing List

Write it down — every time: *Once everything is packed, write down what you actually put in each container and tape the list to the tote lid (keep a photo of it on your phone, too). Months from now you won't remember what's in the bin, and if your home is damaged you'll know for certain what you carried out — which helps enormously with insurance and with simply knowing where things are.*

Use the boxes below, then add your household's specifics. Update it each time you pack in for a new season.

Season start-up checklist

- Rollaway tote loaded and staged near the exit / in the vehicle
- One go-bag packed per person
- Pet supplies packed; carriers accessible
- Cleanup & recovery gear staged
- Written contents list taped to the tote lid + photo saved to phone
- Last-Minute Grab List posted by the door
- Food, water, and medication checked for expiration
- Destinations and routes confirmed current
- Home walk-through video recorded for insurance
- Vehicle fuel topped off / EV charged at season start

Where Will You Go?

Decide this before you need it. In a real evacuation, options disappear fast: hotels fill, roads close, and shelters reach capacity. Map out several destinations now and rank them, so the decision in the moment is simply “go to option two.”

Public shelters

During large disasters, FEMA, the Red Cross, local churches, and community organizations open shelters. They are a genuine safety net — but space and resources are limited, privacy is minimal, and pets may not be allowed. Treat a shelter as a backup, and the more self-reliant your own kit is, the more comfortable you'll be there or anywhere else.

Hotels and motels

List several in advance, in different directions out of town, because the ones nearest the disaster fill first. When you choose, think about what makes a multi-day stay workable for your family:

- **Distance and direction** — pick options on more than one evacuation route, so a closed road doesn't strand you.
- **Convenience to work**, kids' schools, and family routines if the displacement runs long.
- **Pet policy** — confirm which ones take animals, and keep those at the top of the list.
- **Book early**; many travelers wait too long and find every room gone.

People who will take you in

Friends or family outside the immediate danger zone are often the best option — more comfortable, lower cost, and pet-friendly. Have the conversation now, not during the emergency, and confirm they're far enough away to be unaffected by the same event.

My destinations — fill in and keep current

Priority	Place / contact	Phone	Pets OK?
1			
2			
3			
Shelter (backup)			

Routes, Meeting Places & Staying in Touch

Plan more than one way out

Build a family emergency plan with at least two routes out of your neighborhood, because the obvious road is often the one that's blocked or jammed. Walk or drive each route once so everyone recognizes it. Ready.gov has a free family-plan template worth using.

Designate an out-of-town contact

Pick one person who lives far enough away to be unaffected. In a disaster, local phone lines and cell towers jam, but a long-distance call or text often still goes through. Everyone in the family checks in with that one contact, who relays everyone's status — so you're not all trying to reach each other at once.

Two meeting places

- **Right outside the home** — a specific, named landmark like the mailbox or a particular tree, for a fast house fire where everyone exits separately.
- **Farther away** — a location outside the neighborhood (a relative's house, a specific parking lot) for when the whole area is evacuated.

Worksheet on the next page....

Item	Our plan
Out-of-town contact (name & phone)	
Meeting place — right outside home	
Meeting place — farther away	
Primary route out	
Alternate route out	

Document Your Home Before You Leave

Take a few minutes — ideally at the start of every risk season — to record a video walk-through of every room, the garage, and outdoor structures. Open cupboards, closets, and drawers and narrate briefly as you go. This footage is the simplest, fastest proof of ownership you can give an insurer later, and it costs nothing but a few minutes on your phone. Save a copy to the cloud and a second copy on the flash drive in your tote.

Quick method: *Walk slowly through each room. Open every closet and cabinet. Say out loud what major items are and roughly when you bought them. Don't forget the garage, attic, tools, electronics, and anything stored outdoors. Email the video to yourself or upload it so it survives even if the phone doesn't.*

Rehearse the Plan: Your Rock Drill

A rock drill is a rehearsal. In military planning and combat operations we would walk an operation through step by step — shadow-boxing the whole event — to surface the risks, vulnerabilities, and resources we hadn't planned for. You can also assign responsibility to members of your family. Who grabs what, who is responsible for what. Then we built in controls, made changes, and finished the plan before it ever happened. Do the same here. Before you finalize your packing list, run the two walk-throughs below and write the story as you go. The gaps will reveal themselves.


Exercise 1 — A Day in the Life

Pick one weekday and one weekend day and play the whole day out in your mind, hour by hour. What do you touch, use, and depend on? Now add friction: what if it's raining? What if someone gets sick? As the day unfolds, the things you'd truly miss become obvious. Then fast-forward 30–40 years: what would you want your kids or grandkids to still be able to see, hold, and share? Those answers point straight at what belongs in your tote.



Exercise 2 — The Evacuation

Now rehearse leaving. The order comes to go — what is your pack-out plan, and in what order do you load the vehicle so everything fits, like a well-packed set of Legos? Picture pulling away from the house. Then let the plan get tested: the car breaks down, you catch a flat, the only nearby hotels won't take pets. Play it all the way through. Every snag you hit on paper is one you won't hit for real.



Test your plan — look for:

- Risks — what could go wrong (fire behavior, blocked roads, weather, timing)

- Vulnerabilities — who or what is hard to move (pets, elderly family, medical needs, mobility)
- Missing resources — gear, documents, cash, fuel, or communications you don't yet have
- Single points of failure — one car, one route, one phone, one copy of a document
- Time — how long packing actually takes; is it realistic under pressure?

Risks, vulnerabilities & gaps I found

My plan to mitigate the risk or correct the shortage

