

# Debris Hunt/Survival Shelter

Spring/Summer/Fall

Grades K to 8

Building your own survival shelter is one of the most fun and satisfying activities. It's also amazing to take found natural materials and make a warm, dry and cozy shelter.

This is also a great way to be active outside. If you're working with a partner or group this is also a great activity for team work and cooperation.

This shelter is best made in your own backyard or school yard if you have the space and materials. You can make them in forested areas but you may end up having furry and non-furry visitors!

If you do not have the material in your yard you can collect them at a local park or wild area. I have even collected curbside leaf bags from the neighbours.

- Remember to only take "dead fall" that is, only materials that has fallen to the ground.
- Please do not take any living plants or branches so as not to damage plants and habitats. This activity is easiest to do in the fall when the leaves have just fallen.
- It is best to do this activity with the guidance and support of an adult.

## Step 1

Gather one long straight branch or small log 8 to 10 feet. Cut off the twigs and branches (Have an adult do this or closely supervise this if an older child is using a saw!)

Lay the branch against a stump or low lying branch in a tree. See diagram. Make sure the area is not low-lying and prone to flooding!

Remember the smaller you make the shelter the cosier it will be. I usually make it big enough for an adult and a child so that you can have picnic or hot chocolate parties! They

can be made larger if you are at a school and want more children to fit inside. I once made a shelter large enough to fit 8 children! I could sit at the entrance and read nature stories.

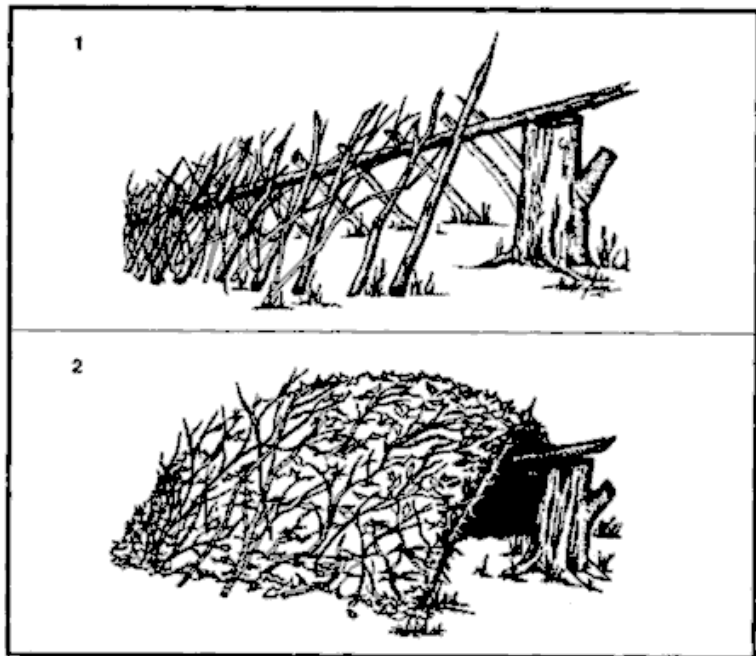


Figure 5-11. Debris hut.

## Step 2

Gather 80 to 100 smaller branches of various sizes. **Lean these branches against the 8 to 10 foot long branch/log. See diagram.**

Figure out which direction the prevailing winds come from and make sure that the entrance to the shelter is facing away from these winds. The prevailing winds in southern Ontario come from the **south-west**. Use a compass to figure out the directions.

## Step 3



Once all the sticks and branches are in place start to pile leaves, pine needles, grass and other dead plant matter on the frame. **I find leaves the easiest to use** and collect.

Make sure that the gaps between the sticks are only tiny. Any larger gaps

might have leaves fall through. Now and then go inside the shelter and **look for holes where the light is coming in.** Fill these in.

**Fill the inside of the shelter** with leaves as the ground can be cold and damp. This will add insulation and comfort.

## Step 4

Lay more sticks and branches on top of the leaves as this will help to hold them in place.

**Enjoy your shelter!** Keep an eye on it. It may require some maintenance. It is fun when the snow comes as this will add more insulation.

Try a water test. On a warm or hot day have a child lie inside the shelter. Pour water from a water can and see if the child stays dry!

What creatures build shelters like this? Squirrels build similar types of shelters called "Dreys" up in the trees. They often use their large tails as a "door" to block cold air from coming in through the entrance.

## Curriculum Links

This fits well with **Active Living and Physical Fitness** that is found in the Ontario Curriculum

For links look to **Health and Physical Education by Grade, Section A and A2**