BEGINNER QUICK START

Ready Together.

A simple first kit. No usage calculations.

Start with the essentials. Build at your own pace.
Know what you have, what you need and when to leave.

01

CORE

72 HOURS

02

ADVANCED

14 DAYS

03

SUPER PREP

30 DAYS

1 adult / 2 adults / full family / custom households

Checklists • Quantities • Regional modules • Printable worksheets

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General preparedness education. Follow current local emergency instructions.

FIND WHAT YOU NEED

A clear path from here

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BEGINNER / START HERE

Your first kit, without the homework

You do not need to know your household's electricity use, normal water consumption or radio terminology. First, prepare for three days of ordinary needs.

Step 1: count people and choose three days

Count adults, children and infants. Write down pets separately. Begin with the Core / 72-hour goal. Once it works, keep the same simple approach and extend to 14 days. Being a beginner does not limit how many days you can prepare for.

Step 2: check what you already have

Find bottled water, shelf-stable groceries, working flashlights, batteries, phone charging banks, first aid and personal care supplies. Put usable items together. Use an existing bag or bin.

Step 3: buy the biggest missing basics

- Water and food your family already eats.
- A working light for each person, with adult supervision for children.
- Phone charging, a listening radio and paper contacts.
- Essential medication/care arrangements, soap, waste bags and toilet paper.
- A way to leave, a place to go and the supplies dependents need.

Step 4: tell the other people in the household

Show them the supplies and agree who helps children, dependents and pets. Choose one nearby meeting point and one place outside the neighborhood. Keep essential contacts on paper.

Use Beginner mode in the dashboard. It gives shopping quantities and simple tasks. Leave electrical calculations and advanced radio setup for later.

Sources: [3] • Full links in the source directory.

ONE-GALLON JUGS MAKE IT EASY

Water: buy this much to start

Use sealed drinking water. You do not need your water bill or an estimate of showers and laundry. These amounts cover a basic emergency supply, not normal household water use.

Three-day starter	1 adult	2 adults	Family of 4
Basic water	3 one-gallon jugs	6 one-gallon jugs	12 one-gallon jugs
With simple heat / higher-needs buffer*	5 jugs	9 jugs	18 jugs
14-day basic goal	14 jugs	28 jugs	56 jugs

What the dashboard does for you

It counts 1 gallon per person per day, including children and infants. In Beginner mode, choosing heat or higher water needs adds half a gallon per person per day and rounds the total up to whole jugs. *That extra amount is a planning suggestion, not a medical rule or a drinking limit. Individual needs may be higher. [1]

Pets and feeding are extra

Add pet water based on the animal's needs; the dashboard's pet entry is a placeholder to check, not a universal allowance. Infant feeding needs its own supplies and safe preparation plan. For formula-fed infants, ready-to-feed single-use formula is useful when safe water is limited. [8]

Store it safely

Keep containers sealed, cool, away from chemicals and easy to reach. Use smaller bottles if jugs are hard to lift. Follow dates on commercial water. Replace water you fill yourself every six months. If tap water becomes unsafe, follow the current local notice; a camping filter does not fix every kind of contamination. [1]

Sources: [1], [8] • Full links in the source directory.

THREE FAMILIAR MEALS AND SNACKS

Food: plan days, not calorie math

For each day, put aside breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks for everyone who eats solid food. Use normal portions. A bag labeled '10 servings' may not make ten complete meals.

Meal	Simple starting idea	Check before buying
Breakfast	Cereal, shelf-stable milk or suitable alternative, fruit	Enough for everyone; suitable sizes if leftovers cannot stay cold.
Lunch	Ready-to-eat protein or beans, crackers, vegetables	Include a real protein portion and enough food to feel fed.
Dinner	Shelf-stable ready-to-eat meal components, fruit	Choose a full familiar meal that works without cooking.
Snacks	Accepted bars, fruit or other safe favorites	Check allergies and age-appropriate choking risks.

For one adult, two adults or a family

Write a three-day menu. One adult needs nine individual meals plus snacks; two adults need 18; a family of four needs 36. These are meal occasions, not package servings. Infants need a separate feeding plan. Repeat and vary your menu when extending to 14 days.

Count what is ready

In Beginner mode, enter how many complete days of meals you already have for the whole household. If breakfast is covered for three days but dinner only for one, count one complete day. Calories remain available in the detailed modes when you want to check them.

Try one day before buying more

Eat the planned food, use the manual can opener and check how much water and cleanup it needs. Add missing foods. Keep new packages behind older usable ones and replace what you use.

You can start without a camp stove. No-cook food avoids needing extra fuel and a safe cooking location.

Sources: [3] • Full links in the source directory.

NO WATT-HOUR CALCULATIONS REQUIRED

Lights, charging and care: a short list

This is a starter shopping suggestion. It does not promise that a few batteries can power every appliance or last for weeks.

Get or find	How many	What to do
LED light	1 per person; adults manage young children's lights	Keep handy; include two spare battery sets per battery light.
USB power bank	1 around 20,000 mAh per phone you need charged	Get the matching cable; fully charge and test it.
First-aid kit	1 household kit	Check supplies and learn basic first aid.
Personal care / hygiene	3 days of what each person normally needs	Include medicines, soap, toilet paper, waste bags and individual supplies.
Warmth / cooling plan	1 set of suitable bedding/layers per person; a safe destination	Know where you will go if home gets dangerously hot or cold.

Test the phone bank once

Charge your phone from it and note how many charges you get before the bank needs recharging. Results vary. For a 14- or 30-day goal, arrange a safe recurring recharge option or relocation; do not assume one bank is a multiweek supply.

Special care moves to the front

If anyone uses powered medical equipment or refrigerated medicine, contact their provider/pharmacist about an approved backup and where to go before it runs out. Ordinary phone banks are not a medical backup plan. Do not skip doses to build a stockpile. [7]

Avoid unsafe shortcuts

Outdoor stoves, grills and generators stay outdoors in suitable locations. Never heat the house with an oven. A fuel generator must stay at least 20 feet from doors, windows and vents; never run one in a garage or carport. [5]

Sources: [5], [7] • Full links in the source directory.

A SIMPLE RADIO BUYING GUIDE

Communication: listen first, then talk

An emergency listening radio and a walkie-talkie do different jobs. You do not need to buy every kind of radio.

Buy first: one household listening radio

Look for battery-powered AM/FM for local broadcasts AND NOAA weather reception with an automatic alert feature. A 'weather band' alone may mean listening only. For home alerts, SAME county selection and battery backup are useful. Use a separate NOAA alert radio if your portable AM/FM radio lacks automatic warnings. Tune and test it before an emergency. [23]

If you need nearby conversation: two FRS radios

Choose two matching, compliant FRS walkie-talkies. One stays with each separated group. No individual US license is required. Match channel/tone settings and test from the actual locations. 'Privacy codes' do not encrypt your conversation. Do not rely on a big mileage number on the box. [24]

Across town: get help before buying more

GMRS or mesh may help, but neither guarantees a path. GMRS needs a US license; its family coverage does not automatically include friends. Mesh radios such as Meshtastic send short text messages through compatible devices and usable radio links. They are not regular phones, and buying two does not guarantee citywide coverage. [25,26]

Remote travel: consider satellite messaging later

Check the exact phone/device, supported functions, coverage and activation requirements. Many dedicated messengers require service plans; Garmin inReach requires an active plan for messaging and SOS. Learn the test function before relying on it. [29]

Always keep the paper fallback

Write down contacts, meeting points and check-in times. Agree what happens if messages fail. A listening radio cannot call your family or 911, and mesh has no universal dispatcher.

Beginner priority: phone charging + paper plan + AM/FM/NOAA alerts. Add FRS for a nearby group. Learn GMRS, mesh or ham when a specific need justifies them.

Sources: [23], [24], [25], [26], [29] • Full links in the source directory.

A 20-MINUTE PRACTICE AND A SHORT PLAN

Try it once. Then build gradually.

Keep medical equipment and alarms operating. You are checking the plan, not creating a real outage.

The practice

- Find a flashlight and paper contact list without using the room lights.
- Show someone else how to charge a phone and turn on the radio.
- Choose one no-cook meal and confirm all its ingredients are available.
- Gather bags, care supplies and pet carriers; check that your transport can carry everyone.
- Write down one thing to fix this week.

Know when to leave

Follow evacuation orders promptly. Leave danger from fire, gas or carbon monoxide; do not stay because supplies are stocked. Never drive or walk through floodwater. Relocate before you cannot maintain essential care, a safe temperature or sanitation. [10]

Maintain the simple kit

Check food dates, batteries and personal needs regularly. Replace self-filled water every six months. Review after a new medication, school change, new baby or move. Once the three-day kit works, extend the same menu and supplies toward two weeks. [1]

Out-of-area contact and phone

Nearby meeting point / outside-area destination

Who helps children, dependents or pets / backup person

Where bags, medicines and papers are kept

Next small purchase or fix / next review date

Sources: [1], [10] • Full links in the source directory.

READ THE ORIGINAL GUIDANCE

Sources & review notes

Sources were reviewed for this edition on November 16, 2026. Bracketed numbers identify the guidance behind safety-sensitive statements. Quantities, tier milestones, example menus, budget pacing and dashboard formulas include original planning assumptions; they are not official readiness standards.

[1] CDC: Create an Emergency Water Supply
Water baseline, storage containers and rotation. Open official source

[3] American Red Cross: Survival Kit Supplies
Home and evacuation kit baseline. Open official source

[5] CDC: Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Poisoning
Generator separation and outdoor combustion. Open official source

[7] FDA: Safe Drug Use After a Natural Disaster
Medication planning and storage. Open official source

[8] CDC: Emergency List for Families With Infants
Infant feeding and supplies. Open official source

[10] NWS: During a Flood
Floodwater and evacuation safety. Open official source

[23] NWS: NOAA Weather Radio and SAME
Automatic alerts, county selection and receiver setup. Open official source

[24] eCFR: FRS individual licenses, 47 CFR 95.505
FRS operation without an individual license. Open official source

[25] eCFR: GMRS eligibility and family operation
GMRS licensing and permitted family operators. Open official source

[26] Meshtastic: Getting Started
Radio and local client setup. Open official source

[29] Garmin: inReach Device Questions
Active subscription and sky-view requirements. Open official source

Editorial scope

This guide focuses on practical civilian household preparedness. It is not a clinical treatment manual, building inspection or individualized engineering plan. Local instructions, product labels and professional care plans take precedence. Review sources and local arrangements before each hazard season.

Versioning

Update the date and version when changing the guide or calculation assumptions. Keep formulas and examples synchronized. Share the blank materials freely with friends; keep completed household worksheets private.