

Tent Recommendation

Paul Burns

I don't know what a 4 season tent is, honestly. Mine is a 3 season, and I've used it year-round. Maybe 4 season's are thicker or have fewer vents. ... Yup. I looked. 4 season tents are bombproof, expensive, and HEAVY. See, for example, <https://www.rei.com/product/864145/mountain-hardwear-ev-3-tent>.

I swear by my Marmot Limelight 3P (3P = 3 Person). I've used it relentlessly for 6 years and it's never let me down. At a trip a month, that's something like 72 outings ... maybe 150 nights. We have 2 of them; one for me and one for Padraic. When Quinn wanted a tent of his own, we bought the Limelight 2, because it's lighter, and we didn't yet need another 3 person tent. Padraic and I took the 2P to Philmont last year for 82 miles of backpacking. Every ounce matters at that distance, so we took the lighter tent. It was cozy.

Marmot Limelight 3P \$299.00 (Marmot.com or REI.com)
<https://marmot.com/products/details/limelight-3p>
<https://www.rei.com/product/895812/marmot-limelight-3p-tent>

Marmot Limelight 2P \$219 (Marmot.com), \$249 (REI.com)
<https://marmot.com/products/details/limelight-2p-fall-2015>
<https://www.rei.com/product/895809/marmot-limelight-2p-tent>

So, there's your baseline. The question is what do you **WANT**? REI sells 38 3 person backpacking tents. 38! They range from \$199.00 to \$850.00. In my opinion, trusted suppliers include Marmot, Big Agnes, and Mountain Hardware.

Here is what you **NEED**:

- **SIZE:** Unless you want to be VERY cozy, you need a 3 person tent for 2 full size people. We were tight in the Limelight 2P at Philmont, but didn't want the weight.
- **WEIGHT:** You want as little as you can afford. Huge family tent are generally cheap. Small, lightweight backpacking tents get expensive.
- **DOORS:** You want 2; one on each side of your tent. Otherwise, one has to crawl over the other if you go to sleep at different time, awake at different times, or need to pee in the night. The Limelight 3 has 2; the Limelight 2 has 1.
- **VESTIBULES:** This is the area OUTSIDE the tent proper, but still covered by the rain fly. This is where your boots and backpack go. You NEVER want to bring boots or shoes into the tent. There is no floor; just a rain cover. The Limelight 3 has 2; the Limelight 2 has 1 - same as doors.
- **FOOTPRINT:** This is the sheet that goes under your tent to keep out wet and to preserve the bottom of the tent, protecting it from sharp forest debris. It is slightly smaller than the tent so water doesn't pool in it. Marmot includes footprints; for many manufacturers, they are extra money as a separate item. Marmot integrates them ... so, for example, you COULD use the footprint and the rain fly together (without the tent) for a gear storage space or for a light cover on a backpacking trip.
- **GEAR LOFT:** The Marmot tents include a lightweight net in the ceiling that serves well for holding headlamps. Easy to find them in the night when someone needs help; they light up the tent for settling in at night. There are also mesh pockets built into the sides which are GREAT for cell phones and glasses. They are right at your head.

- **FRAME separate from tent:** On the Marmot tents, the aluminum frame goes up, then the tent clips to it. You don't have to slide 18' poles through a sleeve in the tent, then heft the weight of the entire tent trying to get the poles in their sockets. Simply put up the very light frame, then snap on the tent. Easy.

So – that's the baseline. Whether you go with the Marmot tents or not, this is intended to give you a BASELINE for comparison. I haven't used 5 different tents, so I don't have a richly informed opinion. What I do have is a LOT of nights in a tent, and I can't think of anything I would change except maybe weight. Use my Marmot information as a basis for your own comparison.

Now, eventually, you will put your tent away wet and forget about it. You'll open it up and it will smell NASTY. I've done it. When you do (and you will), I'd suggest Nikwax Techwash. It's about \$25 for a 20 oz. bottle, but yields great results.

In terms of vendors, I buy my big ticket items from REI. They are like Nordstrom; if you don't like it, bring it back ... even after using it. They seem expensive, but almost always give you a 10% REI credit at the end of the year, run a couple of good sales per year, and will send you a couple of "20% off one item" coupons from time to time. They and Campmor give a 10% discount to members of the NY-NJ Trail Conference. Pretty good deal.

OK – so that's probably more than you wanted. Good luck.

Paul