

# guide to climbing gear

by Michael Strong

If you leaf through any popular climbing magazine for awhile, it's clear that there is a LOT of climbing gear on the market. Making a choice of what shoes, harness, rope, etc. to buy can be overwhelming, especially for someone relatively new to the activity. For this reason, it's advantageous to begin by taking an introductory course in a program such as ours, where equipment is provided and a community of experienced climbers is available to provide input about what choices to make. Still, climbers have their preferences, and opinions differ as to the merits and shortcomings of a certain item of gear. As a result, it's important to research what's best for you in the context of the type of climbing is in your future. Here are some recommendations:



- Start with a pair of shoes and a chalk bag. Bouldering has become wildly popular and you can work on your techniques and fitness with nothing more than these items.
- Buy a harness and belay device next. Evaluate your climbing needs and think beyond the immediate future. A harness suitable for a local crag might not be the best choice for the mountaineering environment, so it's best if you have a clear understanding of where, and what type of climbing you will be enjoying in the present, and what you aspire to.
- At some point you will most likely purchase a rope so that you can set your own top rope anchors and climb outdoors. If so, you'll need to invest in webbing slings, carabiners and other hardware necessary for configuring climbing anchors. PLEASE take an anchor building clinic so that you are educated in the art and science of anchor building.
- Consider purchasing used gear .... with caution. Used climbing shoes are a great investment so long as they fit, aren't too worn, and meet your needs. Never purchase a used rope that you are unfamiliar with. You have no idea of what stresses have been imposed upon it and you would not want to trust your life to a climbing rope used by Bubba to haul his 1967 Chevy truck out of a ditch. If you know the rope's FULL history (e.g only used by your climbing partner when you've both been to the crag), then it might be a worthy investment. The same logic applies to climbing harnesses.

So, what shoes should you buy? What harness is the best for you? Extolling the virtues of one item is subjective at best. We recommend that you visit a local climbing shop. Locally, [Backcountry Gear](#) and [REI](#) are the two main retail outlets, and both shops have online purchasing options. Conduct your own online research. REI's "[Expert Advice](#)" site includes numerous articles on purchasing an assortment of outdoor recreation equipment, including the following items of climbing gear:

- [rock climbing shoes](#)
- [climbing harnesses](#)
- [belay devices](#)
- [carabiners](#)
- [climbing ropes](#)

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