A tarp will go a long way to ensuring your survival by providing a shelter. Shelter is one of the top priorities in a survival situation, right after personal safety. There are several different ways you can set the tarp up. With anything, there are pros and cons to each setup method and we will address some of them.

This video will show you a few of the ways you can use a tarp to provide shelter. One of the ways is the shelter that can be used when you are on the move. Wrapping the tarp around you is great when you need to gather water, food or wood. The tarp will keep you fairly protected from the elements. Unfortunately, this setup is only good for one person. It is also problematic to make sure it stays securely in place.

A simple lean-to structure is perfect for quick setup and will accommodate several people. This setup is also conducive to having a fire close by in the front of the shelter. One of the biggest downsides to this structure is the amount of wind that is allowed in. The stakes may also be pulled out of the wet ground fairly easily.

In the video, you will also see two pyramid-style shelters. These are both great for blocking the wind on three sides and will hold several people. Like the lean-to shelter, this setup allows for a fire to be placed nearby. One of the drawbacks to this shelter is the necessity for good staking. Failure to properly stake the tarp will result in a failed shelter.

The next design resembles a tipi or tepee. This structure will protect you from the elements, but a fire would not be possible. If constructed right, three to four people could squeeze in.

Lastly, the classic pup tent is simple enough to construct, as long as you have enough cordage and material to create four stakes. One drawback to this shelter is placing it in the wrong position could be a disaster. Because of the open ended style, it could become a wind tunnel of sorts if not placed with the sides against the prevailing winds.

As you familiarize yourself with each of these styles of shelter, there are a few things you need to keep in mind. Always form some sort of barrier between yourself and the ground. This will help prevent the cold ground from sapping away your body heat.
Also it is important to keep in mind you don’t want to touch the sides of the tarp when it is rainy or wet out. Despite some claims, the tarps become a water conduit and you will get wet if you are directly in contact with the tarp. Keep this in mind when you are wearing the tarp.

Tarps are an intricate part of your survival gear. Not only do they provide you with several shelter options, they serve a number of different purposes.

Craig Caudill keeps his tarp in one of his canvas bags and when he is not on the trail he is usually instructing others about outdoor survival either here or at his Nature Reliance School.