

When considering purchasing a backpack, several things(factors) come to mind. What type of pack do I need? How big should it be? What is the pack made of and the prices of construction?

There are three different styles of backpacks: Daypacks, external framed packs and internal framed packs. For day hikes, kicking around town going to class, and/or going bouldering during the day, companies offer what is commonly referred to as daypacks or bookbags. Daypacks usually range in size from 500 to 2500 cubic inches. Their intended use is for light loads that are only carried on short distances. Padding on the shoulder straps is added to increase comfort. A few of the more technical daypacks may have waist belts for those full packs. Daypacks are also very useful to climbers and the waist belt transfers the load of their climbing gear to the waist.

External Frame packs are the first generation of framed packs. They have a metal frame with a pack and harness attached to it. They are relatively inexpensive and are easy to pack. They are intended to be used on open, maintained trails. They are most effectively used on open trails where balance is not a critical factor. They are not suited for off trail hiking, skiing, and climbing. Their capacity can range from 2500 cubic inches to 7000 cubic inches. Again, they are easily packed partly because there is an abundance of room on the outside of the pack to strap sleeping bags, ground pads, tents, or other miscellaneous cargo. However these packs have a tendency to be less comfortable than their counterpart, the internal frame pack.

The internal frame pack was designed with the extreme user in mind. It fits to the body, following the curvature of the back and bends with the body. The ideal user is for extreme skiers, alpine climbing, and off trail hiking. However, they have become very popular for every kind of use.

The name implies the design. The frame is constructed on the inside of the pack. The frame is usually made from either carbon fiber, fiberglass, aluminum stays, or a combination. Any of these materials can be formed to fit the back, to offer the closest, comfortable fit available. The stays transfer the load of the pack to the harness system, which places the weight onto the waist. Internal frames offer better balance by giving the user a lower profile, which can not be achieved with an external pack. The capacity of internal packs generally runs the same as the external frames run, 2500 to 7000 cubic inches. However, because the sleeping bag is most often carried on the inside of the pack, the external frame pack, per cubic inch, can carry a greater load than the same capacity internal frame pack.

The internal frame packs usually run a good \$150-\$250 dollars more than the external packs and require a little more attention to how the load should be packed. If you are seriously considering purchasing an internal frame pack, go to your local gear shop and ask the resident packer how he packs his gear. This is a wonderful source of information because people that work in the stores are gear hounds and love to critique their system(packing system). This enables them to be a more efficient user and you can learn a lot from their experience so you will know mistakes they probably already made and will not have to experience them personally. This will only increase your pleasure of the outdoor experience.

Both frame packs have a harness system and both frame packs should transfer the weight of the pack to the hips for a comfortable hike. The harness system consists of shoulder and waist straps. There are secondary straps, referred to as compression straps that pull the pack and load closer to body. What most packers find is that compression straps give the pack greater load adjustments, which alter the way the pack is carried. Most internal frame packs have more adjustments available and in turn are usually more comfortable. But notice, that does not imply that external frame packs are uncomfortable, because they very effectively distribute the load to the hips. Internal frame packs just give better contact with the back. Going into the fit will only be a reader's nightmare and plus most gear stores will have a good fitter. Find him and you will be set. Look for the guy/gal with a passion for talking about packs when questioned. Ask for advice, because gear hounds love to talk about their wonderful ways of doing what they love to do.