

Sit-on-top Kayak Accessory Selection - Choosing Backrests, Knee Straps & Paddle Leashes

Selecting a sit-on-top kayak seat

For the most part a seat for a sit-on-top kayak is an accessory, not a permanent part of the kayak. These kayak seats are sometimes sold with the kayak as a package deal. Sometimes they must be purchased separately. One may purchase a replacement kayak seat to substitute an inadequate "package deal" or to replace a lost or poor fitting seat.

As a trend many newer model kayaks now come with a built-in articulated seat back that is adjustable to some degree. These built in seat backs do not suit everyone and they too can be replaced. It is a simple job to remove the old seat and install some new strap eyes.

When selecting a sit-on-top seat, the question is not so much "Will this seat fit my kayak?" but "Will this seat fit me?".

Sit-on-top kayak seats are universal, all seats will fit all sit-on-top kayaks, some better than other others, but not to any degree worth worrying about. Also, most seats will be quite comfortable for most people, again, not worth the worry. In selecting a seat you have 3 criteria:

1. Seat Back Height:

If you are very tall, about 6 foot or more select a taller seat, about 18 inches tall. If you have a bad back, and know or feel, that extra support will help, select a seat with a back about 14 to 18 inches tall. If you are a very relaxed paddler, who may do more lounging than paddling a taller seat will provide more comfort. Kayak fishermen often prefer a taller seat back. Kayak sailors will also often prefer a taller seat.

If you are of average height a seat back about 12 to 16 inches will be more than adequate for support. If you are a very active paddler a shorter seat back will provide greater freedom of movement for full torso rotation (proper forward stroke), and the ability to lean back and to the side (Eskimo rolling) as well as better boat control in dynamic environments. (Top photo, tall back on left, short back on right.)

2. Seat pad Thickness:

Seat pads for sit-on-top seats run about 1/2 to 2 inches. If you have a lack of natural padding and know that a plush seat will be a benefit, look for a seat pad about 1 1/2 to 2 inches thick. Most kayakers will do fine with a seat pad about 1 inch, even for a long trip. If your kayak is tippy you may want to consider a thinner seat pad, or use only a back band. Some sit-on-top kayaks are considered to be a "wet ride" with a lot of water in the cockpit. If this is the case you will want a booster seat with a thick seat pad. While a 2-inch seat pad will help most rise up out of a wet seat, some may want to consider the Drifter Kayak Seat by Surf To Summit with a 3-inch thick seat pad. The Drifter seat pad is firm, not squishy. It is comfortable, but it is not plush. The Drifter will conform its shape to fit a wide range of wet kayaks. (Top photo, thick pad on left, thin pad on right.)

3. Seat style and construction:

Seat back stiffness is something to consider. Some seats have stiffening rods to provide ridged back support. These seats are comfortable, but kayak surfers and rough water paddlers should avoid stiffening rods as they will prevent Eskimo rolling and the leaning postures required in the surf zone and rapid rivers. Other seats are thermoformed from foam slabs that provide a very stiff back support, yet flexible for some rough water adventure. Other seats, typically nylon construction over foam slabs are very flexible, and can be considered safer in the surf zone. (Photo above, back band on left, full seat on right.)



Standard side straps with a adjustment buckles are adequate for all sit-on-top seats. Double or triangle side straps can provide a more stable seat, with greater support, but may be more complicated to adjust. Rear straps are universal for the most part.

Seat packs can be added, removed and swapped on some seat styles. My suggestion is to select a seat that has a seat option and get the basic seat pack. A pack on the seat will be invaluable for stowing goodies that are needed while under weigh. If you really have to trim cost get it with out the pack, knowing that you can add one later. If you have a clear need, for a pack such as a fishing pack, or a water bottle pack, then select the appropriate seat pack. Bear in mind that the seat packs are interchangeable, so you could use a dry pack on one outing, and a hydro pack on the next. Import Info: Seat packs are not interchangeable from brand to brand. Select the same brand of seat pack as your seat. Not all seats, from a single brand, will have a pack option.

Selecting Leg Straps

To gain extra performance a sit-on-top kayaker can use leg straps. Leg straps are often called knee straps, thigh straps and thigh braces. The term thigh brace also applies to part of a sit-in-side kayak that serves a similar function, but I feel that the term should not be



used as it could cause confusion. The term leg strap is the best as a descriptive term, but I was introduced to the term knee strap and have always called this sit-on-top accessory knee straps.

Sit-on-top kayakers who paddle on rough water, open ocean, white water rivers and in the surf zone should use knee straps to gain better control of their kayak. Sit-to-top kayakers who paddle much less challenging waters do not need knee leg straps. (Photo above, top to bottom, ergonomic, strong, extra features, basic.)

Kayak surfers, white water paddlers, Eskimo rollers and rough water paddlers should select a very strong pair of leg straps. They should avoid straps with side release buckles. For kayak touring select knee straps with comfortable form fitting padding and easy adjustment with side release buckles. Four multiple users be sure to select knee straps with easy adjustment. Leg straps are functionally all the same. Budget style straps will function just as well as fancy straps, comfort difference is minimal.

Selecting a Paddle Leash:

The purpose of a paddle leash is to simply keep the boat and paddle together. If the kayaker maintains a grip on the paddle shaft he can stay with the kayak after capsizing.

Kayak surfers should use a paddle leash to control their kayak after capsize. Paddlers on open and windy waters should use a paddle leash as a safety measure. Beginners should use a paddle leash to prevent paddle loss as they lean to maintain stability and practice deep-water re-entry. Flat-water kayakers who have experience, and paddle on calm protected waters do not necessarily need a paddle leash. A paddle leash should never be used on white water rivers, or water with strong currents and many obstacles.

Select a coil paddle leash for kayak surfing. A coil is safer because it can break in entanglement situations. Tubular webbing leashes are the most durable and very strong. They are a good choice for general purpose, recreational paddling and touring. An experienced kayak surfer who uses leg straps can use a tubular webbing leash if they remain seated during most wipe-outs. For fishing a coil will not snag a hook, but it can tangle with fish line. A tubular webbing leash will snag a barbed hook, but is less likely to tangle with fish line. Plain bungee cord can snap back at the user, causing injury.



For kayak touring choose a short to medium length leash. Connect it to the kayak using the bowline attachment method, cockpit or fore deck attachment method. For kayak surfing select a long leash, attached to the bow grab handle. For fishing a shorter leash with cockpit attachment is best. (Photo above, tubular webbing upper left, coil no clip upper right. coil with clip lower.)

Kayak packages rarely come with leg straps and paddle leash. These items will usually be a special purchase, and may require a little customization of the kayak, by adding strap eyes in strategic places.


Tips:


Your seat and leg straps should last for many years. Most paddle leashes will last a long time too. Expect to replace coil paddle leashes from time to time. Kayak surfers should carry a spare leash. Over time you may discover a need to replace your seat, leg straps and/or paddle leash with different versions that suit your needs better. New accessories can refresh the look of an older kayak.

Take care of the accessories by rinsing them in fresh water after each use. Let fully dry before storage. Keep in a cool, dry location, out of the sun. Lubricate brass snaps with light oil as needed. Do not leave the accessories on the kayak, out in the sun, all summer long. Do not car top with the accessories still attached to the kayak.


Proper adjustment is the key to comfortable seating. Setting up the seat takes some practice. It may take several adjustments to get the right fit. Experiment with the adjustment straps of both seat and leg straps to get the best results. Be sure to see the related article: "**BACKRESTS, KNEE STRAPS & PADDLE LEASHES**"

At The TopKayaker Shop:

 Brass Swivel Clips Use as replacements for broken and corroded clips. Three Inches, 8cm.

 Can convert some plastic buckle backrests into clip backrests & as spare parts for repair kit. Trigger Snaps This offers an alternative to slide bar brass clips that can cut the water-softened skin of your fingers.


Strap Eyes

 These strap eyes (pad eyes) are black nylon, chrome or stainless steel. Strong enough for all but the cruelest punishment. The industry standard for kayak assembly, most commonly used for backrest and knee strap attachments, leash, shock cord, deck lines.

 **Buckles** Plastic buckles used for most sit-on-top kayak accessory applications. Use as

replacements for broken or jammed buckles or to convert some brass clip backrests into plastic buckle backrests. Tri-glides Can be used to create a loop in inch & a half webbing straps common on rear backrest straps, knee straps and some cargo/hatch straps. This part can be used to customize or repair your SOT kayak accessories.

Tri-glides

 Sold in pairs. Can be used to create a loop in inch & a half webbing straps common on rear backrest straps, knee straps and some cargo/hatch straps. This part can be used to customize or repair your SOT kayak accessories.

[YouTube Video Link:](#)

[Kayak Accessory Attachment](#)