

Choosing a Boot that Fits You and Your Needs

If you're in the market for some waterproof sea boots, the first order of business is to determine how and where you will be wearing them. Make a mental list of your boot must-haves based on how you will be using them. If you're a weekend sailor in Florida or a cruiser in the Caribbean (where bare feet are the norm year-round), expensive, heavily insulated boots are overkill. In these more benign sailing conditions, a shorter—calf-height—boot is sufficient. But if you're an offshore cruiser or long-distance racer, the high-end, warm boots with top-notch traction may be a worthy investment. The boots you take are the ones you're stuck with, and if they fill with water on Day 1, they'll still be wet and cold on Day 4. In these cases, a tall, well-insulated boot is best.

Similar logic applies to what you'll likely be doing on the boat. Long hours at the helm or on the rail call for a better insulated boot. Foredeck crew will need something more lightweight and flexible.

Fit: Sea boots are no different than any other sailing apparel or safety gear: Proper fit is paramount to proper function. The best traction in the world does no good if your feet slide around inside the boots or if your calves are too small to fit in a skinny leg hole. We recommend trying them on in a store before committing to a pair. Try them on with the socks you plan to wear

them with most. People who like to layer socks should look for a pair with adequate room for wool or waterproof socks.

Then ask yourself: How's the overall comfort? Does the insole conform to your foot and give support? Does the upper boot fit close enough to the leg to allow it to be worn under pants? (A closer fit is better, as long as the boot still goes on and comes off easily.) Is the boot tall enough to keep out the weather but not so tall that it encumbers kneeling or sitting?

Try to spend 20 minutes wearing the boots in the store. Even the best made boots can rub some feet the wrong way. So pay attention to any chafing at the back seam, heel, across the toes, or at the instep. Saving \$20 on a less expensive boot in the store won't make the blisters feel any better when you're at sea.

Construction: In the realm of "rubber" boots, PVC is the most durable construction material. The rubber boots tested here were made of a rubber composite, which is heavier than PVC yet is still temperature sensitive. Rubber boots are less expensive and easier to care for than leather/Gore-Tex boots, but they often don't last as long.

Features: *Practical Sailor's* must-have boot list includes a removable footbed, heel and toe reinforcements, tabs or gripping material to help you pull on the boots, and easy removal if the wearer goes overboard.