

# Choose The Right Tire Tread

While road-tire treads are strikingly similar, off-road tires come in so many models it can be confusing, initially, trying to pick one out. The key to making a successful choice of either tire type is selecting the appropriate tire for the terrain you'll be riding.

## Tires For The Road

Looking for a little added traction from a road tire? Consider getting one with traction grooves, which some experts believe provide added control in wet and dry conditions. (Other experts claim that road tires are so narrow that any tread placed on them has a negligible effect. We'll help you decide, based upon our own experiences.) Innovative modern clincher casings can provide an extremely lively and resilient ride, comparable to what you would expect from a premium tubular (a type of tire used by professional racers where the tube is actually sewn inside). A new rubber compound, silica, is found in quite a few new upper-end road tires. Silica improves adhesion and lowers rolling resistance without sacrificing tread durability.

## Off-Road Tires: Tubes Or Tubeless?

When buying new tires, first determine if your bike uses standard tube tires, which contain an inner tube inside the tire, or if yours use the tubeless type, which don't include tubes. The illustration shows how these tire types differ.

Tubeless tires do away with tubes by using a special rim, tire and rim strip that seals the tire so an inner tube isn't necessary (though you can use one if you wish). The advantage of tubeless tires is being able to run lower tire pressures, which provides additional traction, control and comfort. This is possible because there's no tube to damage should you hit a pothole or rock and bottom out the tire.

If there's a disadvantage to tubeless tires, it's that they are a bit more fussy, and because there's no tube, if there's even a small leak, you have to figure out where it's coming from and how to fix it whereas on a standard tire and tube set-up, you can easily patch or replace the tube to repair leaks.



## Off-Road-Tire Tread For Soft Conditions

For soft conditions, loose rock, and loose climbs, pick a fairly wide tire with tall, broad, paddle-like knobs. It's important that the tread's knobs have a stable base, for traction when you lean them over on a hard surface. Tread that is overly flimsy can also lead to durability problems. Tires for soft conditions are usually front- or rear-wheel specific.

## Off-Road-Tire Tread For Hardpack

For hardpacked surfaces, there are tires that have closely spaced small knobs, and sometimes no center knobs at all. They can be narrower than soft-condition tires as well. If there are rocks strewn into your hardpack, use a smooth but wide tire. Another key to getting a good hardpack tire is making sure that the knob is at least twice as wide at the base as it is tall. If it's too tall, the tire will deflect under hard cornering loads.

## Off-Road-Tire Tread For Mud

If you think you may encounter mud on a trail with few options for avoiding it, the key is to use narrow tires with widely spaced lugs. Wider tires will jam your frame stays and fork with mud. Narrow tires can also penetrate through the soft mud on top and reach the harder ground below for better traction. Choose longer knobs for more grip, or shallower knobs for lower rolling resistance where there's no mud.

