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Are You Packing? 5 Inexpensive Ways to Store Your Food

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You can spend a fortune on [food for long term storage](#) ^[1], but if you don't protect your investment, that money could be completely wasted. Proper storage containers don't have to cost a fortune. You can glean many different kinds of containers from things that would normally be thrown away. Once you've alerted friends and family that you are seeking these containers, you will likely be given more containers than you could ever use!

Food must be protected from three specific "[enemies](#)" ^[2]: oxygen, moisture and pests. Proper containers are like an

insurance policy on your food. Careful [storage practices](#) ^[3] combined with the right containers are (Hint: Before repackaging your dried foods for storage, send the item to the deep freezer for a couple of weeks to kill off any mealy bugs or pests that could be lurking in the product.) Choose your storage location carefully, because even the best storage practices can be hampered or derailed completely by [rodents](#) ^[4], extreme temperatures or excessive moisture.

Soda Pop Bottles

One of my favorite methods of storing dry foods is in leftover soda pop bottles, because the containers are a freebie! Our family doesn't drink much of it, but we do get the occasional club soda. Other folks drink lots of it, though, and are usually happy to pass their empty bottles on to us, especially in our city, where we pay for garbage disposal. This method is not for extremely long term storage but will keep food fresh and pest-free for 2-3 years. Date your bottles and rotate them out of your storage pantry into your kitchen within a reasonable amount of time. Rodents will chew right through plastic, so this method is only to be used when you are reasonably certain that mice cannot access the storage area.

When opting for this method, look on the bottom of the bottle for the code. You want to find the word "PETE" or "PET". This is the recycling symbol and it indicates that the bottle in your hand is at the lowest risk of breakdown that will cause toxins from the plastic to leach into your food.

We use these bottles for water storage and dried food storage. I've used them for sugar, salt, beans, rice and flour with absolute success.

For food storage, wash your bottles and be sure that they are thoroughly dry. If they have moisture in them, your food will be ruined. Use a funnel to pour in your dried foods. If you feel the food requires it, you can fold up a desiccant packet and shove it into the bottle as well. I've used them for sugar, salt, beans, rice and flour with absolute success.

Other Plastic Containers

As mentioned above, the recycling code "PETE" or "PET" means that a container is one of the most food-safe and unlikely to pose a health risk, assuming it is not exposed to high heat.

Other plastic containers that I have washed and reused for storage have included coffee jars, peanut butter jars, juice jugs, ice cream tubs, pretzel jars, dog treats and protein powder canisters.

Plastic containers that do not close tightly are not recommended for anything other than very short-term storage. Things like margarine tubs, yogurt or sour cream containers or plastic dip containers are better used for leftovers. Never microwave your food in plastic.

Glass jars

Lots of store-bought food comes neatly packaged in glass jars. While these lids cannot reliably be resealed for canning using a hot water method, they do close tightly and work well for dried food storage.

I've redeemed glass jars from pasta sauce, instant coffee, salsa, jelly, honey garlic sauce, mayonnaise and other condiments, nuts, olives, relish and pickles. I reuse these jars in my kitchen like canisters. I soak them to remove the labels, and then wash them in the dishwasher. After making sure they are thoroughly dry, I fill them with things like dried fruit, nuts, cereal, oats, flour, coffee, sugar tea bags, beans, rice, barley, pasta and quinoa. I have them stored in an old china cabinet for day-to-day use and it gives my food storage a nice old-fashioned country look.

The larger glass containers are in the basement storing zip lock bags full of legumes and rice. Like the plastic containers above – this method is not meant for 10 year food storage but it works well for a couple of years. Glass has the benefit of being rodent-proof, as I have yet to meet a mouse who could chew through it to get to the goodies inside! I was recently lucky enough to find extra large canning jars at a yard sale, and they have also been pressed into duty in this manner, since I found them too large to realistically use for actual canning.

#10 cans

I know, I said these ideas were all freebies. But I can't leave out #10 cans as a reusable storage source. Some of them, like coffee cans, come with a plastic lid that can be used once the can is opened. For those which do not, replacement lids can be [purchased online](#) ^[5] for 25 cents each. I find that a very reasonable price for adapting something that would otherwise be thrown away.

I often reuse these cans for the original purpose of coffee when I buy it in bulk in short term packaging. They are also good containers for sugar, flour, or powdered milk. When you are using a plastic lid, keep in mind that these containers will not be rodent-proof.

Food-grade Buckets

If you're very lucky, you can acquire food grade buckets for free. If you have friends in the restaurant industry, you may have more food grade buckets than you can handle. The industry uses large 3-6 gallon plastic pails for everything from bakery supplies to condiments. If you are sort of lucky, you may be able to buy these for a small fee that is still only a fraction of the price you'd pay to purchase unused buckets from an online source or an LDS cannery.

These buckets can be used in many ways. The most long lasting way to store food in the buckets is by using the following process: fill Mylar bags with your food item, heat sealing the bags, and place them in the bucket with an oxygen absorber or desiccant. Many foods will last almost indefinitely when packaged in this manner.

If you have not yet purchased Mylar bags and sealing units, you can use standard zip lock freezer bags, remove as much of the air as possible, and place them in the bucket, putting the lid on tightly. This method will only keep your food fresh for a year or two, so keep that in mind when packing them, and rotate this food into use more frequently. Also, if you are not using Mylar, be sure that the bucket has not retained the smell of the former contents or that smell will be absorbed by your food. Garlic scented milk powder is unlikely to be a hit when reconstituted and used with breakfast cereal.

Before purchasing an expensive storage system or bulk containers, look for the freebies from above. Also be sure to check out [different outlets](#) ^[6] for your supplies: local thrift stores, yard sales, and online sites like Freecycle and Craigslist. Every penny you save on storage is a penny you can spend on food!

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[4] rodents: http://readynutrition.com/resources/rat-proofing-your-food-storage-pantry-in-5-easy-steps_26102011/

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