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Shopping Off the Beaten Path

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It's time to take your prepping outside the box – the Big Box, that is.

If you are limiting your prep shopping to the Big Box stores like Costco, Sam's and Wal-mart, you are missing a lot of golden prepping opportunities.

The low price is not the only reason that unusual shopping locales can be even better than the brightly lit, sanitized stores at the mall. Don't write off the purchase of second hand items as second best. By being willing to shop in unusual places, you can access items that are no longer readily available. Sometimes you can luck into

collections of goods that would take you years to acquire on your own.

I have come across some real prepping steals over the past few years. A few of the things I have found are:

- Cast-iron cookware
- A non-electric applesauce mill
- A hand crank coffee grinder
- Canning jars
- A canning kit
- Pyrex bowls
- Blankets and quilts
- Candles
- Oil lamps
- Camping equipment
- Hiking equipment
- Duffel bags and backpacks
- Gold and silver jewelry found in piles of costume jewelry
- Sewing supplies, yarn and fabric
- Tools
- Fishing equipment and supplies
- Hunting equipment
- Gardening equipment

So where can you find all this awesome, rock-bottom prepping gear?

If you are looking for second-hand gear, hard-to-find items and collections of things, there are many different ways to acquire them.

Instead of spending your Saturdays at the mall, consider picking up a newspaper and mapping out a route for local yard sales, garage sales and estate sales.

There are also many great online resources for second-hand and/or discounted goods. To name a few, take a look at Craigslist, Kijiji (in Canada), EBay and Amazon. If your area has a Freecycle group, it is well worth sifting through the multitude of daily messages to see what

people are offering, especially since everything on the site is free for the taking. If you participate in Freecycle, remember to build some "Freecycle Karma" by offering things that you do not need to help out others on occasion. Always keep your personal safety in mind when dealing with strangers from the internet. Occasionally, predators use these sites as a means to find victims. To protect yourself from robbery or assault meet in a neutral place, bring another adult with you and don't give out your address.

Scout out your local thrift stores. I have located the stores around frequent destinations in order to make stops that do not require a special trip, since thrift store shopping sprees can be hit or miss. Look for thrift department stores like Value Village; church thrift stores like St. Vincent de Paul, the Goodwill Store and the Salvation Army; pawn shops (a great source for weapons); junk yards and auto salvage yards.

Print ads can still be a good source of used items, although with the advent of the internet they are not as prevalent as they used to be. Check out the classified section of your local paper and also check the racks at the convenience store for trader magazines and newspapers. Some areas also deliver a free weekly classified newspaper right to your mailbox.

Military surplus stores can supply you with more than just camo. Knives, hiking gear, camping gear, camping cots and stools, gas masks, footlockers, ammo cans, arctic gear and sturdy clothing and footwear are all readily available.

Garbage picking and dumpster diving can net you some fantastic freebies. Much to my children's dismay I just can't seem to drive past a good junk pile without at least slowing down. Most memorably, I have gotten water jugs, the odd piece of furniture and a cast iron meat grinder from the curb side. I've also liberated (with permission) a display unit from behind a store that now holds canned goods in my basement.

Think creatively about your prepping needs. We all know that being prepared is more than simply having food in the pantry. By thinking outside the Big Box, you don't have to have tens of thousands of dollars to spend on the proper equipment and supplies to help ensure your survival.

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