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Chapter 3: Preparing Your Basic Survival Stash

- Food Storage
- Water Storage and Purification
- Survival Shelters

If you've given any thought to survival, you know the big three -- food, water and shelter -- are the foundation of any long-term survival plan. If you prepare to provide these three items for yourself and loved ones, you're farther ahead than probably 90 percent of the public.

Many would say water is the most important of the three, but we'll address them in the order above: Food, water and shelter.

Food Storage

You may be able to survive a few weeks or even a month without food, but why would you want to? Without food, you will become weak, susceptible to illnesses, dizzy and unable to perform survival-related tasks. Sure, water may be more critical to short-term survival, but it's much easier for even the unskilled survivalist to find water in the wild (the safety and purity of the water is another story, but we'll tackle that next).

This section will deal with several key areas:

- How much food do you need?
 - Why so much food?
 - Using and storing traditional, commercial foods

- Rotating foods
 - Baking items
- Special "survivalist" foods
- Home-made survival foods
- Hunting and gathering in the wild

How Much Food do you Need?

Here's the short answer: You can never have too much food stored away for hard times.

How much is the minimum for you and your potential survival situation is an answer you'll have to come up with after reviewing the table you developed in Chapter 1. (You did do that exercise, didn't you?)

Will three days of food be enough, as many suggest? Or do you need a year's worth? Captain Dave can't tell you what's best in your situation, but he suggests that two weeks or more is the *minimum* for anyone in any potential survival situation. One to three months? Now you're talking. A year? Let's hope you never need it. A year may be excessive for most, but hey, better safe than sorry (have you heard that one before?) If you're wondering how you can afford a month's worth of food, see Chapter 7.

Why should you stock up on so much food if the worst you're planning to prepare for is a heavy winter storm? Several reasons:

- It may take a while for store shelves to be replenished. Think back to the heavy storms that hit the East Coast in the winter of 1995-96. 30 inches in cities such as Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia shut the city down for more than a week. And the trucks carrying supplies were stranded on the side of an interstate highway somewhere in the midwest.
- You may be asked to feed friends or neighbors. Think how you'd feel if on the sixth day of the storm you and your family were enjoying a delicious, rich, beef stew while poor old Mrs. Frugal next door was down to a used tea bag and the bread crusts she usually gives the birds? Or what if friends were visiting for the weekend and unable to return home because of the inclement weather, earthquake or other emergency?
- Food rarely goes down in price. What you buy now will be an investment in the future. If you shop carefully over time (see Chapter 7), you can lay in

stores of goods on sale or at warehouse club prices.

- You will be protected from price gouging. Do you really think the last load of milk and bread into the store before the storm hits will be discounted? Shelves are often cleared out right before a blizzard or hurricane is set to hit. And food isn't the only item likely to be in short supply; one grocery chain reported that when storm warnings went out, they sold more rolls of toilet paper than there were people in the city. Batteries, bottled water, candles and other staples are also going to be in short supply (see the [next chapter](#) for more on non-food survival items).
- You will be prepared for a crippling blow to our food supply system. As I write this, many are predicting our food supply is tottering on its last legs. Whether its a drought (like we saw in 1996 in Texas and Oklahoma), a wheat blight, the destruction of traditional honey bees necessary for crop fertilization or simply the world's exploding population, they will tell you our food system is falling apart. Captain Dave will let you make up your own mind, but wouldn't a few hundred pounds of red winter wheat and other grains sealed in 5 gallon buckets make you feel better?

Let's say you decide to start small and plan to stock up a week's worth of food for your family. While the "survivalist" foods such as MRE's are a great supplement, you should be able to get by for this short a time (a week or two) on the traditional, commercial foods in your larder.

This existing food reserve should not include food in your refrigerator or freezer because you cannot count on those items remaining edible for more than a day (fridge) or three (freezer), at most. So half a cow or deer in the freezer is great, but you may have to cook, smoke and/or can it on short notice, should the power be out for a long time.

A quick examination of your cupboards and cabinets will tell you how much you need to add to ensure you have enough food for a week. If you have a few packages of pasta, some cans of vegetables, a box of crackers and a jar of peanut butter, you're halfway there. But if you have a habit of dropping by the deli every time you're hungry, or shopping for the evening meal on your way home from work (as many single, urban dwellers do), you'll need to change your habits and stock up.

A detailed list of suggestions and food storage information is available in the [Food Storage FAQ](#) but you should generally buy canned (including items in jars) or dried foods. Review our list of commercial food items and their suggested storage

times when making up your personal list but keep in mind your family's eating habits, likes and dislikes. Also, remember that you may not have access to a microwave and other modern conveniences, so pick food items and packaging that can be prepared on a single burner of a camp stove or even over an open fire.

Rotation Systems

The main difference between the commercially prepared foods you buy in the grocery store and the specially prepared "survival" foods is the shelf storage. You can't store grocery store items for five to ten years, as you can with specially freeze-dried or sealed foods packed in nitrogen or vacuum sealed. As a result, if you go with a larder full of grocery items, you can't develop your food stash and walk away. You need to rotate your stock, either on an ongoing basis or every two to three months. This will ensure you have fresh food (if you can consider canned and dry food "fresh") and do not waste your food and money.

There are many systems for rotating your stock:

- Captain Dave finds the easiest is to put newly purchase foods at the rear of the shelf, thus ensuring the oldest food, which will have made it's way to the front, will be consumed first.
- You can also number food packages with consecutive numbers (a "one" the first time you bring home spaghetti sauce, a "two" the next, etc.) and eat those with the lowest number first.
- If you store your survival stash in a special location, you'll need to physically remove and replace 20 to 25 percent of it every two months (thus ensuring nothing sits for more than eight or 10 months). The materials you remove should be placed in your kitchen for immediate consumption.

As a general rule, traditional canned foods should be consumed within a year. For cans with expiration dates, such as Campbell's soups, you may find you have 18 months or two years before they expire. But for cans without a date, or with a code that consumers can't translate, mark them with the date purchased and make sure you eat them before a year passes.

Generally, canned foods will not "go bad" over time, unless the can is punctured. But the food will loose its taste, the texture will deteriorate, and the nutritional value drops significantly over time.

If you find you have a case of canned peas, for example, that are nine or 10 months old, simply donate them to a soup kitchen, Boy Scout food drive or similar charity. This will keep them from being wasted and give you a tax deductible donation.

Baking

Simple raw materials for baking, such as flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, oil and shortening, can be assets in a survival situation. With these staple items, you can make everything from pancakes or rolls to breading fresh fish.

For those looking for a simpler answer, mixes for muffins, corn bread and pancakes mean you do not need to add eggs or measure ingredients. These ready-made or pre-mixed ingredients can be a boon. Of course, you may need a Dutch oven or griddle for that stove or fireplace.

For long-term survival storage, honey stores for years and can replace sugar in recipes. Rather than storing flour or meal, purchase the raw grain and a hand mill. Then you can mill your own flour whenever necessary. Red winter wheat, golden wheat, corn and other grains can be purchased in 45-pound lots packed in nitrogen-packed bags and shipped in large plastic pails.

Survival Foods

Storing two to four weeks of "commercial" food isn't too difficult. But when you get beyond that, you really need to look at specialized foods prepared specifically for long-term storage. These generally fall into several categories:

- Vacuum-packed dried and freeze-dried foods
- Nitrogen packed grains and legumes
- Specially prepared and sealed foods such as MRE's (Meals, Ready-to-Eat) with a five-to-ten year shelf life

All offer one main advantage: long storage life. Some, such as MRE's and packages sold to backpackers, are complete meals. This is handy and convenient, but they tend to be expensive on a per-meal basis. Others, such as #10 cans (about a gallon) of dried items, are usually ingredients which can be used to prepare a full meal. These ingredients include everything from macaroni elbows or carrot slices to powdered milk or butter flavor. Your best bet is a combination of both full-meal entrees and bulk items.

As the name implies, MRE's are ideal for a quick, nutritious, easy-to-prepare meal. They are convenient to carry in the car, on a trip or on a hike. They have very long shelf lives (which can be extended by placing a case or two in your spare refrigerator). On the downside, they are very expensive on a per-meal basis and they do not provide as much roughage as you need. (This can lead to digestive problems if you plan to live on them for more than a week or two.)

Large canned goods, on the other hand, are difficult to transport. But if you're stocking up your survival retreat (see chapter 2) or planning to batten down the hatches and stay at home, the large canned goods are easy to store and can keep you well-fed for months. While individual cans can be purchased, most popular are sets of multiple items. These are designed to provide a specific number of calories per day (they'll recommend 1,800 per day, but you'll probably want more) for a set period of time, often three months, six months or a year. Remember, however, if you have four people in your family or survival group, purchasing a one-year supply of food will only equate to three months worth for the family.

Captain Dave recommends purchasing the largest set of these canned, dried foods your budget can handle. Then supplement the set with items tailored to you and your family or survival group. Also, MREs and MRE entrees are excellent supplements, because prepared sets of #10 cans are primarily vegetables, pasta and grains, while MRE entrees are usually meat-based.

You may also want to add a few special items, such as hard candy or deserts, to reward yourself or for quick energy. That's one area where MREs and MRE deserts can be a great supplemental item. It's pretty tough to store pound cake or brownies for several years, but the MRE makers have managed it. They also offer crackers and peanut butter, bread and some great side dishes.

While we're on the topic of supplements, don't forget to add vitamins and mineral supplements. Fruits, green vegetables and other items rich in vitamin C and other nutrients may be scarce, so a good multi-vitamin is well worth the space it takes up in your stash.

NOTE: Since the guide was written, Captain Dave has started selling long-term survival foods and other related supplies. If you are

*interested, please
visit our
Shop*

Survival

Home Made Survival Foods

There's nothing like a cellar full of canned goods you grew and put up. From spaghetti sauce to your own jam, canning goods is a tradition that will come in mighty handy in a survival situation.

But Captain Dave doesn't pretend to be an expert. Whenever you're dealing with canning fruits, vegetables or meats, its important to follow the latest specifics from the true experts. (OK, so maybe government isn't all bad.) See our list of links for canners and others looking to preserve food.

You can also dry, vacuum-pack and otherwise prepare food for storage. Vacuum pumps are available commercially or can be constructed in your own home. You can use them to seal dried food in mason jars and other containers.

When packing foods for storage, you want to eliminate oxygen (which is why a vacuum is so good). Bugs, such as weevils, and other organisms that can destroy your food need the oxygen to live, just as we do. That's why commercial companies who prepare survival food pack grains, cereals, pasta, beans and other food in nitrogen-filled containers. You can accomplish a similar packaging yourself by using dried ice.

Simply take the 10 pounds of noodles (or 25 pounds of rice or other dried food) you picked up from the warehouse and put them in an appropriately sized plastic bucket with a lid that can create a good seal. The add several chunks of dried ice. As it sublimates, your bucket will fill with carbon dioxide, which will displace all or most of the oxygen (since carbon dioxide is heavier, the oxygen should rise to the top and out of the bucket). Place the lid on the bucket, but don't seal it all the way until you think the dry ice has completely turned to gas. This is a fine line, since you want to seal it before oxygen starts leaking back into the bucket. Remember, as soon as you open the bucket, whoosh! the air will rush back in.

Hunting and Gathering in the Wild

Image this scenario:

A small nuclear

conflict erupts in the Middle East destroying several countries and much of the world's oil supply. Airbursts knock out more than half of the world's satellite communications systems. Due to favorable weather conditions and plain dumb luck, fall-out over the United States is not life threatening -- as it is in part of Europe, Japan and the Far East -- and the EMP damage to our electronic systems is minimal. However life as we know it is disrupted as fuel prices reach \$10 and then \$20 per gallon.

Fruits and vegetables grown in Florida and California can't reach markets in other states. Corn and wheat crops are

abundant, but farmers don't have the fuel to run harvesters. And those that do, fill their silos, but the grain can't reach the market. Store shelves are emptied in two days of panicked buying that sees a five-pound bag of flour go from \$1.69 to \$8.99.

The economy goes into a tailspin, and inflation reaches 300 percent in the first two weeks. You're lucky you still have a job, but you wonder how on earth you'll get there without the car.

The president tries to regain control of the country, by releasing stocks of food and oil, but it's just a drop in the bucket. In a measure of how

*bad things have
become, he
declares marshal
law and
nationalizes all
oil, refineries
and oil
reserves.*

*Suddenly, Uncle
Sam is the only
gas station on
the block, and
they're not
pumping for
anybody, no
matter how much
silver you cross
their palms
with. Riots
break out in
seventeen major
cities and the
national guard
has to be called
out. LA burns
(again) as does
Philadelphia.*

*There's a
national curfew
and trouble
makers are hauled
off to camps. 60
Minutes runs a
story on these
concentration
camps, which
nobody ever
admitted were in
existence, but
they experience
technical
difficulties and
the broadcast is*

cut off in the middle of the story. FEMA becomes a four letter word.

Suddenly, the two weeks of food in your larder looks frighteningly small. You wish you had more room on your credit card, but then, smart merchants are only accepting cash. You can't wait for the few tomato plants and cucumbers you have growing in the back yard to bear. But you know it won't be enough. Winter is coming, and the papers say the utilities can't guarantee there will be enough gas or electric to heat peoples' homes.

Maybe it's time to look to nature to help feed you. That's great if you are a farmer or have five or more acres of tillable land. But if not, or if it's too late to plant crops, that means a return to hunting, trapping and gathering.

If you can identify wild plants that can supplement your existing diet, good for you. If not, better go out and buy a few guide books right away. Get ones with

pictures, you'll need them. Just hope everyone else doesn't have the same idea, or berry bushes and apple trees will be stripped clean in seconds.

Captain Dave has eaten all sorts of wild plants, from salad greens he probably would have tromped over on any other day to wild mushrooms to the heads of milkweeds (properly prepared, of course). Its not his first choice, but its better than tightening the belt.

Captain Dave supports hunting as a great American past time, an important tool in game management and a terrific source to supplement your traditional menu during these good times. But will it be enough to put food on the table during a survival situation? Don't count on it.

If you're a hunter, you know how crowded it usually is on opening day. Could you imagine what the local patch of forest would be like if everyone's dinner depended on hunting? How quickly would we strip this continent of all edible game? Planning on fishing? So are all your neighbors.

There are some areas of the country where the ratio of people to wildlife will still support sustenance hunting. But for most of us, that's not the case. You may be able to supplement your food supply with some game, but don't count on it.

What does Captain Dave recommend you do if the above scenario comes to play?

- At the first hint of trouble and rising prices, visit the local food warehouse and grocery stores and buy as much as you can afford. Get the 50 pound bags of rice and the 25 pound bags of flour. Use your credit cards and part of your emergency cash stash, if necessary.
- Hunker down at home and protect what is yours.
- Keep a low profile and avoid contact with others, except fellow members of your survival group. Avoid trouble and confrontations.
- Hope that within six months the country will have recovered or at least stabilized. If not, the population will probably be a lot smaller when winter is over.

Food Storage and Preservation Links

Food Storage FAQ

This tome is a complete guide to storing food for survival needs. It is much more in depth than the above information. Available in both html for on-screen viewing or as a downloadable file.

Rec.Food.Preserving and Rec.Food.Preserving FAQ

The place to ask questions and learn more about home-preserved foods. According to their charter: Rec.food.preserving is a newsgroup devoted to the discussion of recipes, equipment, and techniques of food preservation. Current food preservation techniques that rightly should be discussed in this forum include canning, freezing, dehydration, pickling, smoking, salting, distilling, and potting. Foodstuffs are defined as produce (both fruits and vegetables), meat, fish, dairy products, culinary and medicinal herbs. Discussions should be limited to home-grown or home-preserved foods.

Here are a few more. The site's name generally says it all:

[Home Canning Tips](#)

[Captain Dave's Survival Shop](#)

[Grain Supply Update... By Geri Guidetti](#)

[Walton Feed's Self Reliance Pages](#)

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