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Storage Containers

OK, I'm ready to start my food storage program. What should I put the food in?

You should use food grade containers for storing anything you intend to eat. A food grade container is one that will not transfer non-food chemicals into the food and contains no chemicals which would be hazardous to human health. If you are uncertain whether a container is food-grade or not then contact the manufacturer and ask if a particular container is approved for food use. Many manufacturers are beginning to indicate on the container label if it is approved for food use.

Plastic Containers

What makes a bucket or plastic bag "food grade"? And where can I find them?

Plastic films and containers of food grade quality are made from polycarbonate, polyester or polyethylene. Their characteristics in terms of density, permeability and strength vary. To limit permeability to moisture and oxygen, films of the above plastics are sometimes laminated together, frequently with a metallic layer. Military food packaged in just such a metallized polyester, polyethylene wrap has a long shelf life (5+ years) if kept cool.

From: Denis DeFigueiredo Originally posted in: rec.food.preserving

I called Berlin [eds. note, a plastic container mfgr. [1-800-4-BERLIN] and spoke to them, plus an outfit called Kirk Container (they manufactured some 5 gallon paint buckets I saw in the local hardware store). Both places said that buckets made from High Density PolyEthelene are approved for food. It has to do with the possibility of interaction between any chemicals in the food and the plastic. As it turns out, Kirk manufactures only one kind of bucket, and then markets it for paint, hardware, food, etc. The price is right on the "paint buckets" - much cheaper than the local restaurant supply house.

High density polyethelene buckets will have HDPE stamped on them, or a recycle symbol with a "2" in the middle.

DISCLAIMER: I'm only passing on information I received from the manufacturers. I am in no way professing these things to be absolute fact!

Where do I find food grade containers?

From: "Jenny S. Johanssen"
Originally posted in: rec.food.preserving

Denis - saw your comments on food grade buckets and thought I'd offer my solution. My son cooks at a local Mexican restaurant. They get all their strawberries (for the strawberry margaritas at the bar) in 3 gallon plastic buckets. Now you know how many margaritas pass through a Mexican bar each night - lots. So I asked my son to save me some buckets. They are ideal for storing flour, rice, I made (from my home grown raspberries) a delicious raspberry cordial in one of the buckets, another I made Raspberry wine in. My motto is why buy

when you can recycle! Thanks for giving me the time and space to add my two-bits worth. - Jenny

From: Woody Harper
Originally posted: rec.food.preserving

...I get topping buckets from Dairy Queen and I have to make sure there is no trace of the strawberry syrup left. A little detergent and elbow grease followed by a chlorine solution bath keep everything nice and clean.--

OK, I've got some used food grade containers, but they're pickle buckets. How do I get the smell out?

I've had fairly good luck doing it this way. Since vinegar is the primary smell in pickles and it's acidic, we used a base to counteract it. First we scrubbed the bucket well, inside and out, with Dawn dish detergent. I imagine most any sort will do. Then we filled the buckets with hot water and dissolved a cup of baking soda in each. Stir well, get the bucket as full as you can and put the top on. Put the bucket in the sun to keep it warm so the plastic pores stay open as much as possible. In a couple of days come back and empty the buckets. Rinse them out, fill with warm water again and add about two cups of bleach and reseal. Put back in the sun for another couple of days. Empty out and let dry with the tops off. We completely eliminated the vinegar smell this way. It might be possible to cut the time down a lot, but we haven't experimented that much since we can't get that many pickle buckets.

Metal Cans

The metal cans used by the canning industry for wet-pack canning are designed to last only a few years. Most losses of canned foods occur due to the breakdown of the can rather than extensive deterioration of the food under normal storage conditions.

The major disadvantages of metal cans for putting up your own food are that the cans are hard to come by, they take specialized equipment to use (but so do glass jars) and they can only be used once to seal in food. Not being reusable is

the flaw that has largely made them unpopular for home canning use. Since they're not interested in reusing the containers, metal cans make great sense for the commercial canning industry. The cans are both cheaper (for them) and lighter than glass jars and this adds to the economy of scale that makes canned foods as cheap as they are in the grocery store.

For home canners, glass jars are better because even the smallest of towns will usually have at least one store that carries pressure and boiling water canners along with jars, rings and lids. With tin cans, however, a can sealer is necessary and that usually has to be ordered from its manufacturer.

Tin cans are not really made of tin. They're actually steel cans with a tin coating on the inside and outside. Some kinds of strongly colored acidic foods will fade in color from long exposure to tin so a type of enamel liner called "R-enamel" is used to forestall this. Certain other kinds of food that are high in sulfur or that are close to neutral in pH will also discolor from prolonged contact with tin. For those foods, cans with "C-enamel" are used.

The excellent food preservation book, *Putting Food By* Chapter 6 (see reference list) has a section on the use of tin cans for wet packed foods.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints -- The Mormons

There is one way that metal cans do make economic sense to use and that is by pooling community resources to purchase the can sealer and the cans. The LDS church does just this in their family canneries and have, in fact, almost exclusively gone over to using metal cans from all other containers. This is done primarily for dry-pack canning. Those areas that do wet-pack canning primarily use canning jars. By sharing the cost of the equipment and purchasing the cans in bulk quantities to reduce cost to the lowest possible level, the advantage of metal cans over plastic containers can then begin to outweigh the disadvantages.

If properly protected from corrosion, metal cans are gas-impervious and immune to rodent attack, qualities that plastic containers are weak on. The cans still aren't resealable, other than with a plastic lid, after they're opened, but for a one time use they're pretty tough. Of course, there is still the oxygen and moisture that is trapped inside to deal with, and the heat of the storage area they're kept in, but this is common to all food storage regardless of the container.

It may not be necessary to form your own community to purchase a dry-pack can sealer and bulk quantities of metal cans. If you live in the right area your local

LDS church may have facilities they will allow you to use and perhaps even suitable food products they will sell you.

Most facilities will be located at one of the LDS Bishop's Storehouses located in various places around the country, but some churches also have their own local facilities. The easiest means of finding out is simply to ask the LDS church member you know. If they don't themselves know, or you don't know any Mormons then a little phone book research will be necessary. Find your nearest local Mormon church and ask about speaking with the local Bishop of the Ward or Relief Society president. Either one of those two individuals will be able to give you the information you seek.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please do keep in mind that the individuals responsible for the family canneries are all volunteers with demands on their time from many areas. Be courteous when speaking with them and, if there are facilities for use, flexible in making arrangements to use them. You will, of course, have to pay for the supplies that you use, cans and lids at the least, and any food products you get from them.

Any food products you want to have sealed in cans will need to fall within their guidelines of suitability for that type of packaging. This is for reasons of spoilage control since many types of foods just aren't suitable for just sealing in a container without further processing. If you purchase food products from them, they will already be within those guidelines.

I've corresponded with many LDS members and have even contacted the LDS headquarters in Salt Lake City to get the official word. Keeping in mind that not every area may have facilities for use and that the family canneries are run by volunteers, they are quite earnest about allowing non-church members to use their facilities. It's worth investigating.

See also IV.C.2 [Preventing Corrosion of Canned Goods](#).

Glass Jars

Compared to metal cans, glass jars are very stable, although they don't take being banged around very well. The cardboard boxes the jars come in are well designed to cushion them from shocks. The box also has the added bonus of keeping out damaging light.

The major advantage of glass jars is that they are reusable, both jars and rings, with lids being the only part of the package that must be purchased new for

every use. If you're not using the lids to form a vacuum seal such as would happen when doing boiling water or pressure canning then even the lids can be reused.

When you get right down to the bottom line, it is seldom practical strictly in terms of dollars and cents to put up your own food in jars. When you count the cost of your equipment, including the jars, rings, lids and all the rest, along with a not inconsiderable amount of your personal time, the cost of purchasing or growing your produce, you'll almost always come out ahead to buy food canned for you by the commercial canning industry. That said, forget about the strict bottom line and examine more closely why you want to put up your own food. For many, gardening is a pleasure and they have to have something to do with the food they've grown! There's also the fact that for many, you simply cannot buy the quality of the food you can put up for yourself. The canning industry tries to appeal to a broad spectrum of the general public while you can put up food to your own family's specific tastes. Home canning is not so much about saving money as it is about satisfaction. You get what you pay for.

If home canning appeals to you, please allow me to point you toward the rec. food.preserving FAQ where much very good information about methods and techniques may be found.

One source of gallon sized glass jars are sandwich shops and restaurants that use pickled peppers. I have a Subway (tm) sandwich shop that saves its pepper jars for me and receive several per week.

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