



# Safe Food Storage

Ditch those plastic containers and bags for healthier and more environmentally friendly kitchen storage alternatives.

By Claire Vath | November / December 2017



Store leftovers, frozen meals and to-go lunches in safe and reusable storage options.

PHOTO BY ISTOCK/CAYMIA

**When preparing lunch**, we focus on packing healthy items for a well-rounded diet. But what about the containers we use to carry and store that food? How healthy are they?

Plastic cling wrap, for example, is generally composed of either PVDC (polyvinylidene chloride) or LDPE (low-density polyethylene), both chemicals potentially linked to hormone disruption. The foil we use to wrap up dinner leftovers can leach minute amounts of aluminum into our food, which may be linked to health concerns. And those BPA-free plastic containers into which you pour your child's milk or water? Manufacturers often just swap out BPA for bisphenol-S or bisphenol-F, similarly harmful endocrine disruptors, to maintain the plastic's durability.

While only a tiny portion of these chemicals gets into our food supply from containers, in larger amounts these chemicals may disrupt the endocrine system and contribute to other health issues. Experts aren't clear on how much a person can safely consume. A 2015 study from the University of Calgary found that the BPA substitute bisphenol-S may actually be a more potent endocrine disruptor than BPA.

While plastic and foil offer food-storage convenience, we pay for it environmentally. Plastics, the worst environmental offender, account for 46,000 pieces of ocean litter per square mile, according to the U.N. Environment Program, and they can take hundreds of years to biodegrade.

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When selecting a food-storage product for health and sustainability, it pays to do a little research. "I look at the company as a whole," says zero-waste expert Kathryn Kellogg, author of the blog *Going Zero Waste*. "Do they use recycled materials? Are they organic materials? What does their packaging look like? The most important thing is to look for products that will last. The most sustainable thing you can do is buy a product that can be used over and over for years to come."

So, how should we store leftovers, cart to-go lunches and stash meals in the deep freezer? Try these safe (and reusable!) storage options.

### Glass

Perfect for counter, pantry, fridge or freezer storage, glass is endlessly recyclable, doesn't leach additives into food and enables easy viewing of contents. "My favorite way to store food in the freezer is in locking glass containers," Kellogg says. "These multipurpose storage containers easily move from freezer to fridge for defrosting, and then straight to the oven or microwave." Versatile canning jars are perfect for to-go lunches. Pack them chock-full of salads, casseroles or soups. In the pantry, store cereals, beans, rice, spices and other dried goods in glass canisters or jars. Hermetically sealed glass jars are especially good for storage, as their gaskets keep out air and moisture. To freeze liquids such as broths, soups, sauces and preserves, use canning jars once liquids have cooled. Leave a couple of inches of space at the top of the jar to accommodate expansion. Canning jar lids are still treated with a BPA-like substitute, so leaving space also helps ensure foods don't come into contact with the lid. For freezing casseroles and leftovers, choose tempered glass dishes such as Pyrex or Glasslock, which are generally safe for dishwashers, refrigerators, microwaves and preheated ovens.

### Reusable Food Wraps

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How can we wrap sandwiches, store leftover bread and baked goods, or cover a salad bowl if we're not using plastic bags and cling wrap? Consider reusable food wraps that work like old-fashioned butcher paper. Bee's Wrap, for instance, is made from organic cotton and treated with beeswax, jojoba oil and tree resin. These wraps stick to containers in the same way cling wrap does, and they come in a variety of sizes, including sandwich and baguette sizes. Sheets can be washed with soap and water and last up to a year.

### Natural Parchment and Wax Papers

It sounds nice to skip the plastic bags ... until we need to freeze leftover chicken breasts without worrying about freezer burn. Regency's Natural Non-Stick Parchment is made of 100 percent vegetable parchment paper. Wrap it tightly around food items, then store them inside a sealed glass container. Also look for natural wax paper coated with soybean wax or paraffin.

### Stainless Steel

Perfect for grab-and-go lunches, leftovers and the freezer, stainless steel is an eco-friendly, safe and incredibly durable choice for food storage. Bento-style stainless containers for lunches are easy to find, but you need something bigger if you enjoy large-scale food prep. Life Without Plastic's enormous 2.6-gallon stainless-steel container offers an airtight seal with an adhesive-free food-grade silicone gasket and four clips.

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### Cotton Bags

Avoid single-use plastic produce bags by buying your own cotton mesh produce bags, such as the biodegradable and organic choices from Simple Ecology and Life Without Plastic. These bags are also perfect for storage, so bring them to the store then toss them straight into the fridge.

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## Secondhand Storage

Glass and stainless-steel food-storage containers can sometimes be found secondhand at thrift stores or online via Craigslist or other community-swap sites. Zero-waste expert Kellogg loves finding secondhand storage options. "You can't beat the prices, and you aren't responsible for bringing any new resources into production," she says.

Resources

- Bee's Wrap** (<https://www.motherearthliving.com/store/product-category/home-garden/bees-wrap>)  
Plastic-free cling-wrap made from cloth and beeswax
- Life Without Plastic** (<https://www.lifewithoutplastic.com/store/>)  
Cloth sandwich and produce bags; reusable food wrap; stainless-steel lunch boxes; glass containers; 2.6-gallon stainless-steel containers
- Regency's Natural Non-Stick Parchment** ([https://www.amazon.com/Regency-Natural-non-Stick-Parchment-Baking/dp/B001GEZ4W8/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1505752887&sr=8-1&keywords=natural+non+stick+parchment](https://www.amazon.com/Regency-Natural-non-Stick-Parchment-Baking/dp/B001GEZ4W8/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1505752887&sr=8-1&keywords=natural+non+stick+parchment))  
100 percent vegetable parchment paper
- Simple Ecology** (<http://www.simpleecology.com/>)  
Reusable mesh vegetable bags; shopping bags; universal silicone lids
- Kinetic Go Green Glassworks** ([https://www.amazon.com/Kinetic-Glassworks-Container-Containers-55041/dp/B0116IVIBO/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=home-garden&ie=UTF8&qid=1505753048&sr=1-1&keywords=kinetic+go+green+glassworks](https://www.amazon.com/Kinetic-Glassworks-Container-Containers-55041/dp/B0116IVIBO/ref=sr_1_1?s=home-garden&ie=UTF8&qid=1505753048&sr=1-1&keywords=kinetic+go+green+glassworks)) **Oven-Safe Glass Food Containers**  
Airtight, leakproof, oven-, dishwasher- and microwave- safe (without lids) glass freezer storage containers

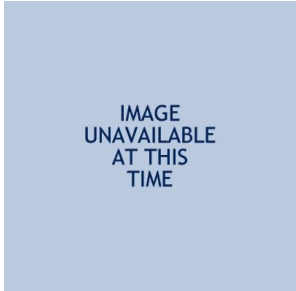
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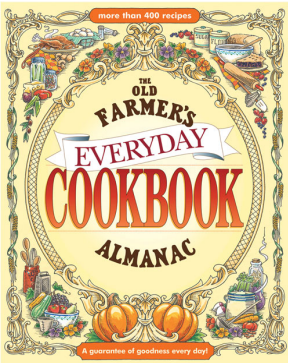
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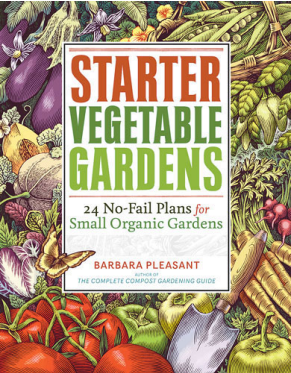
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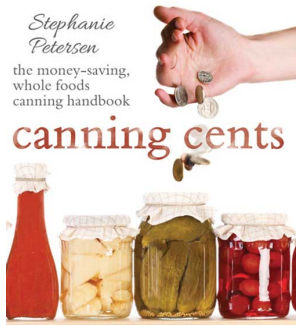
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