

So you Want to Prepare?

Here's how to start a basic food storage.

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A few ideas to help those that are considering storage for the first time.

Knowledge is IMHO the most important prep. First, one needs to understand that there is a threat, and that it may affect them. Then, its possible to examine the threat -be it pandemic, hurricane, flood, nuclear explosion or other disaster, natural or manmade.

Determine just how the threat might affect you. What challenges would it create? What shortages or problems would you are dealing with? What items would you need to see you through, and for how long?

Basic needs are ones that are life sustaining, and their lack is quickly life threatening. Man's most basic needs are Air, Shelter, Water, and Food. Consider your own personal situation- there may be some loved ones that have another basic need that they cannot survive without- for example- someone on heart medication might add that to his personal list of basic needs.

Then think about your own life so far-how do you meet those needs now? Does the threat affect your ability to meet them? An example might be infrastructure failure- it may prevent clean water from flowing, loss of electricity might affect safe shelter if you cant heat your house in the dead of winter. If trucks can't roll, the food stores will not be able to restock; and shortages and store closings will soon follow.

Determine how long that threat might last- a day, a week or two, or months? Then consider how long you wish to prepare to meet that threat. And for how many people you are going to meet it for.

Once the very basic needs are met- there are other important second priority "wants" that we may consider. I will certainly survive without toilet paper-but its an item I wouldn't want to do without! Ditto mosquito repellent. Flashlights are important for me in case the electricity is out. I'm not sure how easy it would be to live with my husband if he didn't get his morning coffee- its high on my WANTS list for sure!

After the important wants are determined-then comes the lower priority- the luxury items. Chocolate is the best example of items that fit in here! What food or comfort items to do consider important, and that you really want to have? You'll see, as you do this, that you'll start thinking of things to add to each column, as the ideas start to flow. You may even change priority on some items as your personal storage programs develop.

Now, you've got an idea of what you'll need to have, for how long- and the next challenge is to figure out how much of it is needed, and how to store it safely and reliably so it is there when

you need it! The best way to do that is to jot down a list on paper of the basic needs, the wants and the other ideas that come to mind.

With your list, now you figure out "how much". One easy way to determine that is to watch how much you currently consume of these needs and wants- then multiply it by the number of people, and then the length of time you are preparing for.

That seems easy until you try it! Its actually kind of daunting, since its some thing we rarely think of- we just "pick up another" at the store when we run out or run low, so don't consider just how much of an item we consume in a week, or month, or year. Most beginner preppers are quite surprised by the volumes they determine when they start to look at it.

If you are the main shopper in the household, one tip that may prove helpful is to take a notebook with you shopping. As you go up and down the aisles, you can write down the items you always buy-and then rough in an amount that you think you'll use in the time period you are preparing for.

There is a high tech way to determine just how much of things you'll want to store. There are several free food storage calculators available on the Internet. The best is a program you can purchase called Revelar- its pretty much the gold standard for dedicated preppers and serious survivalists alike.

The next step is to decide just where you are going to store your items or "preps" As mentioned above the best storage area is cool, dry and even better, dark. Look at the area, and decide how to prepare it for your preps. Shelves, boxes, etc. Get a magic marker for writing the date on your cans, bottles and boxes. Get that area ready!

The is just the start. But its a good one- you've come a long way already, even before the first prep item hits your door! You've assessed the threats, your weaknesses, and started a plan to prepare for them. That puts you way ahead of most people that live at the mercy of the "just in time" world.

Take a deep breath, congratulate yourself for the progress you've made- and get ready for the interesting parts! A little research is up next. Soon, as your storage builds, you'll begin to feel the great sense of accomplishment and self satisfaction that comes from being more self reliant.

I mentioned a little research in the first section. Finished your homework yet? If so, You thought out the basics well and have an admirable start toward more self reliance. You decided what basics you'll store and USE. You've probably realized by now- your preps are not just for one risk, but stand you in good stead for others too, like an earthquake. With hurricane season approaching, the preps other readers are making may do them double duty, too.

Next step- how much of what will you need? Then, what is the best way to store it and keep it safe and usable in event of need?

There are two works on the Internet I would consider definitive references that anyone working to self reliance should have book marked and ready. I highly recommend before anyone goes further that they take a moment to review them, or at least the sections that apply to their personal situation.

Considering that there's a possibility of infrastructure disruption in any natural or man-made crisis, I also recommend printing them out. Create a prep notebook of these and other important tips that you'll find as you continue your preparations. Memory is not always reliable, especially in times of crisis. A notebook of what you've deemed important enough to save may be a priceless time, effort and life saver during any crisis.

Here are the two references:

How to Find Water and Make it Safe

<http://www.grandpappy.info/wwater.htm>

The Ultimate Food Storage FAQ

<http://waltonfeed.com/grain/faqs/>

OK! By now, you have read the FAQ's considered some risks that may affect you, and have some idea of how much you want to store- or at least, how long you want to prepare for. You've thought of some places in your environment that can be used for storage-preferably dark, dry and cool. You've even realized that there are some non-consumable items that you want to store in case resupply is unlikely. In the back of your mind, you're considering how this choice is going to affect your relationships with others- will you share what you're doing, and perhaps the preps themselves if needed, with others outside your household? You may wonder just how the people important in your life will react when you start this new behavior.

You're ready to be a prepper! Now, just how does one go about it?

There are two common ways that people store consumables. Some opt to purchase ready made storage programs, like those available at Walton Foods and dozens of other food storage dealers. With a simple phone call and one (usually large) charge to a credit card, you can arrange for delivery of a number of boxes and pails containing what's needed for however many people you're prepping for and whatever length of time you choose.

It's quick, easy and convenient; and the food itself has an extremely long shelf life if stored in proper conditions- at least 10 years for most of it. But there are some significant downsides to going this route. First and most noticeable is the cost- it's the most expensive option.

From a standpoint of practicality, there's another issue that may be even more important than the cost- it's the edibility. Many of the products that compromise the delivery are not things one eats normally.

The response of many folks who go this route is the thought "If you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything and be grateful for it"! Probably true for most of us.

But hunger isn't the only consideration to a prepper. If there's a crisis, maintaining health is likely to be crucial, too. One of the downsides in a rapid and total change of eating habits is health related- it affects our GI systems, and usually adversely for days or even weeks.

New foods, higher in fiber and containing different proteins can result in diarrhea, constipation and serious gas problems. These affects can range from annoying to debilitating. It may even be life threatening for those with food allergies. Since many of the products are not eaten in everyday life by most, or are in much higher concentration in the food storage than our daily diet, development of food allergy and intolerance is a significant issue.

Children and "picky eaters" may refuse or eat too little if what's available, resulting in decreased calorie or nutrient intake. Even if that doesn't create overt illness or GI distress, it's a significant concern. The stress of crisis and change tends to diminish our immune systems ability to fight off pathogens. Adding poor food intake further affects our immune systems status adversely.

If a crisis that you're preparing for doesn't occur- then the entire expensive food storage unit tends to go to waste.

So what's the other option?

Store what you eat, and eat what you store!

Most of what we consume on a daily basis is available on our grocery store shelves. Most of it will store for at least a year or two without serious loss of quality. Our bodies are used to it, so there's less chance of creating an issue with stomach problems add to your stress (both physical and mental) during a crisis.

Consider the last few days- what meals did you eat, what did you shop for? How much of it came from cans and boxes on the shelf in the grocery store? Of the restaurant and fast food meals you've eaten, how much of that can be stored at home and last for awhile on a shelf, and be easily prepared at home with the kitchen tools and appliances you already have?

Pull out your paper and pen (or your spreadsheet for the techies amongst us!) and make a list- for one week. make 7 columns, and four rows. Write in the day of the week at top of each column and breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks down the side to label each row.

Fill in a commonly eaten and well liked meal in each slot. Avoid choosing menu items that obviously don't store well- a big green chef's salad is a great food choice, but it's not appropriate for this menu. A scrambled egg breakfast is great- but eggs won't keep long beyond the first week of a crisis even if refrigeration is available. So avoid foods that need refrigeration.

Keep your choices confined to meals that are easy and quick to prepare. If possible, choose foods that need the least preparation and cooking (and cleanup!) times. Keep in mind and build in any family food preferences you can, and remember any family dietary issues and restrictions. Chunky type soups, boxed pasta meals, and canned meals may figure prominently, because they are good storage choices.

Now, you've got an idea of just what you will eat if your storage program is needed. Its customized to your needs and preferences. The list reflects what you eat every day- so none of it will go to waste if the entire storage isn't used up in a crisis.

Break down the meals into the component parts that you purchase. Your entry for Wed night dinner- spaghetti with meat sauce- may look like this-

1 lb pasta
1 jar sauce
bread
cheese

Create a shopping list with the items collated- if you've got pasta listed twice that week, than your list will have 2 lbs pasta listed. Continue your list until you've got one full week of meals represented. Remember add to it the items that "make a difference" in satisfaction, frequently they are "condiments" such as the sprinkle parmesan cheese-or mustard, ketchup and mayo for other foods you've listed.

When you're done, you've got list of the items your family will consume, and the approximate amount of each, for one week. You've just created the your basic food storage shopping list! That list alone will give you a storage cushion of one week, enough for most very short crisis situations, like snow storms or hurricanes. That's an accomplishment!

For many types of crisis or disruptions, a week of storage may not be enough to see you safely through.

Just multiply the amount of each item on it by the number of weeks you're preparing for. If you want to be ready for 3 months of disruption- the very least I personally recommend- multiply each item by 13. Now you've got your basic "goal list " created.

You're ready to start shopping! Here's a couple of tips that experienced preppers have learned, and should save you time and money.

Large size cans- lots of food stores now carry extra large cans of vegetables condiments and other foods. They may be a better value than the usual pound size cans. BUT they aren't recommended for most personal or small family food storage programs. Wet pack items will need to be refrigerated after opening if not all used at once. The crisis situation that causes you to break out your storage supplies may include infrastructure problems- and there may be no electricity available to run refrigerators.

Unless you're feeding a crowd, its actually cheaper to use the normal 1 pound cans, since there's no waste. Even for individuals, the smallest size cans- about 8 ounce- may cost as much as the 1 pound. It may be worth opening it, keeping it cool and eating at the next meal. Or include the leftover in soup, stew or breads that day. Depending on your climate, it may last up to 24 hrs un-refrigerated. Boil before serving to kill any bacteria that might have developed.

Once you get beyond preparing for just a week or two, you may decide to add some long term storage foods to your program. My own food storage program consists of 95% grocery store foods. But for some items, I spend much less when I buy specially packed and prepared storage foods. Egg powder, milk powder and some similar items are easier to store, and sometimes even cheaper when purchased this way.

I find much of what I need at Honeyville Grain, and use them almost exclusively because of the affordable shipping (\$4.49 for the whole order in the continental US as of this writing in 2006). Usual disclaimers apply, I'm just a satisfied customer. They also have oxygen absorbers and 6 gallon buckets with lids. <http://www.honeyvillegrain.com/produ...odstorage.html>

Best of luck, and congratulations on your decision to be a more self reliant person. I hope you're one of my neighbors.

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