

Containers for Dry-Pack Storage

Except for oil, which comes in good storage containers, the basic storage items are all dry, meaning they have low moisture content. The way you store them is called dry-pack canning. It is much easier than canning in jars for wet-pack things like canning peaches. The most important thing is to make sure that it truly is completely dry. This includes fruits and vegetables that are dried. They have to be dry enough to be brittle. If they are not, bacteria like botulism can grow in the oxygen-deficient conditions you will create.

The easiest thing is to just buy the cans all packaged from the HSC where they are professionally packed for storage. #10 cans are the “gold standard” for storage items. If you should buy bulk or other products in other places it is important that you store them properly so that they keep well and you do not attract rodents or insect pests. Here are the containers that are approved for storing dry goods:

1. Sealed cans—Cans are the “gold standard” for storage. I like to have at least two lids for every case of cans because lids wear out and they are handy for other storage uses if you choose to use them when the can is empty. *You will have to buy lids if you want them when you buy at the HSC. *Salt, soda, and other possibly corrosive materials should not be kept in cans.
2. PET 1 bottles—These are the clear plastic bottles that are like the ones juices and sports drinks come in. The triangle recycle symbol, usually on the bottom, will have a 1 inside it. Sometimes you can find these new. You should make sure the lid fits so that it is air tight. You can check this by screwing it shut well and holding the lid under water in a sink. Put pressure on the sides of the bottle. If no air bubbles escape it is air tight. Thin little water bottles, while made of this kind of plastic, are not recommended for long-term storage. Soda bottles are good for things like sugar and salt or water storage, but not as thick and nice for other things. I love using PET bottles for storage because I can see what is in them and I can often wash and reuse them. Of all my things these get rotated best.
3. Canning Jars—These are nice because they come in all sizes. I like them for breaking down a whole can or large container of things I won't use quickly. You should not reuse lids used for wet-pack canning, but if the lid has only been used to dry-pack you can reuse it. There is a device on the market that will

vacuum the air out of canning jars creating the same effect as an oxygen absorber and seal the jar. This is a happy thing if you don't have oxygen absorbers on hand.

4. Mylar pouches—While a lot of people like the ease of these and you can buy what you need to use them on-line, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. First, they don't stack well unless you make them flat and get all the air out while you are sealing them. Second, they are not rodent safe and you can lose a lot of storage overnight unless you have them inside a container that is not susceptible to little teeth.
5. Plastic buckets with good seals—These are not my favorite way to store things because they make using the food in them difficult and they are heavy to move and store. Having five of them in your kitchen or pantry is awkward. However, if your family is large enough that you can use up the contents of a bucket within a month then maybe they are good for you. The Home Storage Center does sell oatmeal in these because many people use it quickly. The best use of a bucket is for grains or beans (not powdered things). The method of using dry ice in the bottom of the bucket to displace oxygen is the best for buckets. For a five-gallon bucket, you put a chunk of ice about the size of a soft ball in the bottom, fill the bucket, and as soon as it melts you tap the lid down with a rubber mallet. Oxygen absorbers are not as effective for this type of storage container. I also recommend gamma lids for use after the bucket is open. *I do like the two-gallon pantry pails better, although they are a bit expensive.

All storage containers need to be sealed so that air can't get in. They should be either vacuum-sealed, have oxygen absorbers, use dry ice to displace oxygen, or have food-grade diatomaceous earth mixed into the contents. *Sugar, soda, and salt are exceptions to this rule. These are resistant to bacteria and insects and will store fine by themselves. Adding an oxygen absorber will harden sugar, making it like a chunk of rock.

You can order oxygen absorbers on-line or buy them from food storage stores. They will be spent within 20 minutes of being in the air, so you should have everything ready to put them in and close up when using them. Check when you buy, but most of them are good for up to one-gallon-capacity containers.