

Food Preparedness

Food storage is a very important part of any preparedness, and thoughts on food storage vary widely. Some people store buckets of wheat, corn, beans, and rice. For many people, they would only know what to do with maybe the rice. With the prepper/survivalist fad right now many companies are selling LTS food. Long-Term Storage food.

Some of these LTS foods are just as is, so to speak, like beans or wheat. Some are dehydrated, and some are freeze dried. And of course, some is your standard canned goods. Advice commonly given is 'store what you eat and eat what you store.' That is very sound advice. What they mean is buy stuff that you normally eat and then always eat the oldest item first, so you rotate through your stored food supply.

The great thing about storing food for survival is that it is easy to start and not expensive. Cans of vegetables can often be purchased on sale for about fifty cents per can. Most people have an extra buck so they could buy two cans for storage. You don't have to buy a whole year's supply all at once. You buy a little extra each week. Like when you are planning on eating spaghetti soon, so you buy a box of the pasta, just buy an extra box. Pasta has a long storage life and it is very reasonable to purchase. Start slow and just buy extra of the regular foods you always buy.

So if you eat canned green beans and you buy twenty cans when it is on sale then store it with the oldest cans to the front, so that is what you use first. And the next time they are on sale again buy more but put the new cans in back behind the older cans. This way you rotate your stock of food. And you are only storing food that you will actually eat.

Canned items can often be eaten right out of the can without any further cooking, a big plus in an emergency situation. Canned goods often contain liquid that can extend your stored water supply, another bonus. But if you are not going to eat it don't buy it. So don't buy canned oysters or something if you would never eat it or if you cannot eat it due to an allergy. Only buy what you will eat. Also, buy an extra non-electric can opener (though the trend in canned goods has been to gradually change over to pop-top cans).

Many people don't realize that many items can be stored a long time. Milk can be stored in the cupboard if it is 'shelf stable milk' and can be stored for a year or more that way. If nothing else it is handy to have on hand when you run out of the regular milk. This is found in grocery stores next to evaporated milk and condensed milk (also good storage items). It is just regular milk that is 'super pasteurized' so most people can not tell the difference from standard milk (I can't, and I often use it when I run out of regular milk or when I rotate my stock). This shelf stable milk is usually found in one-quart cartons. A quick look at the expiration date will show you that it is made to store up to a year or more and with no refrigeration needed (and likely will store twice that long with no problems).

Eggs can be bought that are dehydrated or freeze-dried and can last a long time (usually about ten years). Dried butter and cheese can be stored a long time. But stored items don't always have to be something that can be stored for ten years either. Even if it is something that lasts only a year that is fine as long as it is something that you normally eat, just rotate your stock as you eat it.

Canned goods (and most foods) commonly last much, much longer than the 'expiration date.' Companies are required to put on an expiration date, and then occasionally their product is tested by the government to see if it is still good at that point. The company picks the date, and it is to their advantage to shorten the date considerably. Let's say you tested your product and it commonly lasts three years or more. But just to be on the safe side, you mark it as expires in one year (or even less). That way when the government does test your product, there is no chance of them ever finding a bad one. Also, people commonly throw out food that is past the expiration date and just buy more. This is another reason for companies to shorten expiration dates.

You can can your own food. Including butter and meat. Many items can be canned at home and last a long time that way (think years). Most pressure cookers come with a canning guide, or a canning book can often be found next to the canning supplies in stores and purchased there. With a pressure canner, jars, and some lids you can store meat without freezing it. A big plus if there is no power. Home canned food can easily last for way more than a year; actually maybe more than ten years. Just keep in mind that most lids are a one-time use thing so store a lot of them (they're cheap). One company does sell re-usable plastic canning lids (tattler lids).

Ramen is a very cheap food (ask most any poor college kid). It doesn't taste bad, stores pretty good, cooks fast and easy. It is often high in salt content though. I don't recommend that you plan on living on ramen because it is so cheap but it seems logical to include some in your preps. If nothing else it can be what you might hand out to beggars that come to your door. If they see all you have is ramen they will know you don't have much. But if you are starving some ramen would be like a feast.

Don't buy a five-gallon bucket of lima beans if you don't eat lima beans. Don't buy a bucket of wheat if you don't know what to do with it (do you have a grain mill?). One common long-term storage food is white rice. Yes, brown rice is maybe better for you but does not store as long. Rice is easy to fix and relatively fast to fix. It can be added to many other things to make a more filling meal. And it is readily available and pretty cheap to buy. Walmart has twenty pounds of rice for about ten bucks. Seal it up good, and it will store for many years (10 to 20 years or even more).

Rice is also something that many of us already commonly eat. The directions for cooking rice is - - combine rice with double the amount of water (example ½ cup rice and 1 cup water), boil for fifteen minutes, let stand without heat for five minutes, then eat. There is a product called Minute rice or Quick rice. This is precooked and then dehydrated rice. Just add an equal amount of boiling water to the rice, let stand for a minute and eat. Quicker and easier but this product does not store as long as

regular rice but is still a viable option to keep on hand or in your BOB. Remember rice can be eaten by itself or countless things can be combined with it.

Many people buy 'oxygen absorber packets' to put in their sealed LTS food to make it last even longer. Some also include water absorbing desiccant packs. Either or both of these will likely lengthen storage times but whether they are worth the extra money spent on them is everyone's choice. If you regularly rotate your food stocks, I feel they might not be needed, but then again they are not that expensive.

Don't have a lot of room to store stuff because you live in a small apartment? Be ingenious and hide it in plain sight. Take the legs off your coffee table and set the table on top of five-gallon buckets full of food or water. Then cover with a tablecloth that hangs low enough to cover everything. Store food under the bed or in the back of your closet. Stored food is a valuable asset that could save your life. Food is relatively cheap so almost anyone can at least store some for emergencies.

Don't plan on 'living off the land' but you could plan on supplementing your stored food when possible with whatever fresh food you might be able to gather. Many things are found even in towns and cities. Dandelion greens are good to eat and found almost everywhere. Those pigeons that are in the park are very good eating (cook them and add some rice for a very good meal). Squirrels are found in city parks almost everywhere and are quite tasty.

Snare that stray cat. Skin it before your wife sees what it is and then tell her it is a rabbit. Save the guts out of the dead cat and use that for bait for fishing or bait to trap other animals. If it moves, the chances are that you can eat it and protein is vital for survival. See those Robins in the front yard, use your slingshot that is quiet and nab a couple. Cook them and add some rice for a nice meal! (Note it is not legal to kill songbirds like that Robin. But if it is a survival situation then you do what you must to survive).

Buy a book on edible plants in your area with good pictures. Then buy another one, so you have more pictures and a second opinion. Many wild things are edible, but some are not. Know what you are about to eat before you sink your teeth into it. If you are not sure let your mother-in-law try it first or else just pass it by. Books on foraging, edible plants, and plant identification will store forever and supply an unending source of food for you and your family. The key to finding and eating wild plants is to do so well ahead of the time when your life might depend on those wild foods.

Buy the books now and then gather plants on your walks to try out at home. Start slow and only eat small portions at first until you know if your body can tolerate certain plants. Gradually build up your knowledge of edible plants until you know what is not only edible but also tasty. Also, you can learn where to look for certain plants. This knowledge will not happen overnight but will be a gradual process so start now when finding these wild plants is not a matter of life and death. Also, different seasons of the year means totally different plants to look for and often which different parts of the plants to gather. Some plants have to be cooked, and some can be eaten raw. There is much to learn about foraging so start that learning process NOW!

Old vacant places may have fruit trees or nut trees that you can harvest when in season. Most locations in the United States have some form of oak trees that you can harvest the acorns from in the fall. These can be crushed or ground into a meal and eaten different ways but know that you have to soak them first enough to remove the tannins or they will make you sick.

Soak the acorns in plain water for a couple of hours then change the water and soak again. You might have to change the water two or more times. Before soaking them taste an acorn and it will be bitter. After soaking taste again and it will have a nice nutty taste or if still bitter just soak again in more fresh water and re-taste. The bitter taste is the excess tannins found in this otherwise tasty and nut.

When you shoot that stray dog, be neighborly and share the meat with your neighbor. Besides, it will very likely spoil before you could eat it all anyway. Remember if it flies, walks, or crawls it is likely edible and full of protein.

Also, keep in mind that if there is no electric, there will be no refrigerator or freezer to store that meat. And how are you going to be cooking everything? Plan ahead. If you have an all-electric house how will you cook with no electricity? Even if you have natural gas (city gas) that will likely stop flowing to your house if the power is down for a while, so then what?

Do you have a propane gas grill with extra propane tanks? That will work. But if the neighbor sees you cooking on the grill (or smells you cooking up some cat (BBQ'ed cat, mmm!)) he'll be hungry and come over to eat your food.

A propane (or other gas) camp stove can be used inside your house to cook on, in private and in comfort. Remember to have extra fuel on hand for it. Yes, you can always cook outside with a campfire (or inside with a fireplace or wood stove). But you will need firewood, and the smoke will show everyone nearby that supper is cooking!

Many are afraid to use a camp stove inside their homes because they will be asphyxiated by the fumes or it will use up all the oxygen in the room, and everyone will die. Hogwash!

Using a camp stove for cooking your supper inside will not cause any harmful effects. You will use it for ten to thirty minutes and eat a nice meal and suffer no ill effects. This is different than using it for heat where the stove burns for many, many hours at a time. Remember that maybe roughly half of the homes in the nation use unvented gas kitchen stoves that are either propane or natural gas. All of these stoves are the same as a propane camp stove.

Another possibility is cooking with a solar oven. This is basically just a box with a glass front that you set in the sun to absorb the sun's heat. There are many different solar ovens that you can buy or many plans and videos online that show you how to make your own. It can be as simple as a cardboard box with aluminum foil wings to direct the sun into the box and onto the dark pan setting inside that box.

And that brings us to sharing your food.

Sharing food

So you have all that food stored up for your family and all your neighbors' have is a salt shaker and a fork. Do you share? This is a personal question and circumstances could easily change your answer. If you have plenty of food and the emergency situation is for sure just a temporary one, then the likely logical answer is to share with your friends and neighbors.

But what if the situation is very likely to be long-term of a month or possibly even a year? In any bad situation, there will be beggars just like there are now only they will be in larger numbers and much more desperate. And desperate people do desperate things.

In the long-term situation if you share your food with a beggar and he/she/they move on they will return when they need food again. And if another person asks them where they got that food, they will say your house. Soon your house will be the local soup kitchen and your stored food that could have lasted your family of four for a year is now almost gone because of feeding just the four of you are instead feeding ten or twenty or even more.

Now you tell all of them the food is gone. They will not believe that and will assume you are just selfishly hoarding all your food now for yourself. They will band together into a mob to take your food by force and if you or your family dies in the process that will just be too bad for you. Or the best case scenario is they just take all of your food and leave you and your family healthy enough to beg for food just like them.

Or maybe you are heavily armed and when you realize that you must save the remainder of your food for your own family and you will kill to protect the small amount of food that you have left. So now you likely have to shoot and kill all those same beggars that you have been feeding. At that point how have you helped them by feeding them? How have you helped your own family by drastically reducing the amount of stored food you have in storage?

The most logical answer is to turn away all the beggars in the first place, but again this is a personal decision you will likely have to make. Americans are overall a giving people. It goes against the grain to turn away those in need. In the above situation where a disaster is long term, you will have to live with whatever decision you choose to make. The best time to think about it is now instead of then.

One answer is to give your extra food to the local food shelf or church, in times of need. Let them disperse the food to those in need, and the needy do not have to know the food originally came from you. This way you and your family are safer without anyone knowing that you have stored food, but still you are helping your fellow man.

Like I said it is a very personal decision. I might have made you think I am against giving to those in need but that was not my intention. I was merely showing

you a possible poor outcome if you did choose to share your food. Again it is a personal choice to make, and obviously, circumstance would change what decision you would make. But while making preparations for your family also keep your friends and neighbors in mind. Either get additional food to give away or plan on turning them away and not giving away any of your stored food.

And that is one of the reasons that ANY preparations you choose to make for the future safety of your family should be a secret. Everyone who knows that you are ready for any emergency will promptly make their way to your house as soon as the electric power goes off or it starts to rain or snow or any other possible disaster situation occurs.

They will demand to borrow your generator. They will demand to borrow some fuel for their generator. They will demand to borrow your gas grill and propane. They will demand that you feed them. Refuse, and things could easily get very ugly quickly.

If no one knows what you have, then it can be your choice if you decide to share something or not. Some old sayings are very true like 'Loose lips sink ships.' If no one knows that you have stuff it will be Your choice if you share. If everyone knows you have stuff, it will more likely be Their choice if you share.

Look at how many people act at stores having a Black Friday sale; they get aggressive, pushing and shoving and often even fighting. If they do that now over saving a few bucks on something that they likely don't even need, just think how they will act when they are starving and 'think' you have food?

Are you planning on hunting for food? Well so is everyone else. And the sound of a shot can be heard for a very long way. This can draw the guy that does not know how to hunt but does know how to shoot so he can take that deer you carefully stalked and killed. Also, there will likely be roving packs of feral dogs, and they will soon associate that the sound of a gunshot means food for them. A gut pile from a dead deer or a dead hunter someone else shot or you if you are busy gutting out your fresh kill, it will be both the dead deer and you on the dog's menu. The dogs will get food from any of those scenarios.

Caution will be needed all the time. Many people will be trying to hunt for food, and even a poor hunter is lucky sometimes. Wild game numbers in easily accessible areas will diminish rapidly until only the smartest and fastest animals are left alive. But that is for easy assessable areas. If you live in the boondocks far from any urban center, then the wild game will not diminish in numbers so quickly. Same with fish in the rivers and lakes though that will likely take much longer. So sure, supplement your stored food with fresh wild supplies when you can but only depend on what you have stored, the wild stuff, whether plant or animal, will only be a possibility, not a sure thing.

Snares and traps will be very useful for an easy and quiet way to add fresh meat. Both are indiscriminate so they might get you a fat rabbit or a skunk or a cat or the neighbor kid. The snare you set in the deer trail could just as easily kill a kid running down the trail. As with everything use with caution and try to think ahead. Also if someone sees you set snares or traps, they can make it a point to check them daily before you. Or just take them and set them elsewhere.

Garden seeds should be included in your preparations if you do not live in an apartment so in theory, you can then grow at least some of your own food in desperate times. Garden seeds are very inexpensive and take up little storage space. And most things you grow you can harvest the seeds from so you have some to plant the next year again. At a dollar store, you can often buy four packages of seeds for a dollar.

Growing a large garden takes a lot of work, a lot of water, and some amount of knowledge or skill. Once you try growing your own food, you will no longer call them 'dumb farmers' ever again. Obviously, some things will be easier to grow than others and some things you will not eat. If the only thing out of a garden that you would consider eating is some watermelon, then don't bother buying any turnip seeds.

Some things like potatoes you grow from the potato itself. You cut them up, and you can get three or four or more new plants from just one potato. A single potato plant may produce a dozen large tasty potatoes.

A garden can be any size from one square foot to a hundred acres. You can even have a hanging garden to save space! You can grow many things in pots. Many people now often grow some spices or herbs in their homes in simple flower pots to have a fresh supply. Growing things inside your house or apartment in pots keeps it safe from animals and from raiding by pesky humans.

In most cases, your garden will have to be watered, so you have to plan for that when you figure out your water supply. If you have to get your water out of a lake that is a half mile away, your garden is just not going to work out very well for you.

In town, you will have to keep other people from picking the stuff in your garden. In the country, you will have to keep every critter out of your garden. You will likely learn to pray for rain and to pray for no hail. The neighbor's cow or pig could get out and totally destroy your whole garden before you get a single thing out of it. A garden is a great prep item but remember that it is not a sure thing because many things can cause a garden to fail.

Some now recommend planting a guerrilla garden. This is planting seeds at different spots in the general area and leaving them on their own, and you only check them when it's picking time. This has many benefits, like no maintenance, in several spots, so some are likely to survive (all your eggs are not in one basket), concealed from other humans, and does not disrupt having a regular garden at your home. Downsides are because of no maintenance it likely means very poor results, other humans might find it and reap the benefits, wild animals might eat everything, and you did remember all the spots where you planted them right?

Here again, if you have never done any gardening and are planning on it for your very survival at least get a book or two to read first. And remember you can try many different things in pots inside or outside your house first. Plant a potato in that big patio flower pot to try your hand at gardening. There are often some instructions printed on the backs of seed packets to at least get you started correctly.

So let's look at options for your survival food. First and most reliable is your stored food. Second is food out of your garden, a good choice but not a for sure source of food. The third is being a hunter/gatherer and living off the land. This is certainly not a sure source of food and could be dangerous but might work at least

short-term or as an add-on. Fourth is to scavenge/steal/beg/barter food from others, this might be viable but dangerous and not for sure and maybe not very ethical or practical.

If you have pets or livestock are you going to store food for them also? Or is your plan to use your pets AS food? Either would be an acceptable answer. In a long-term situation, pets and livestock will be a valuable source of protein. Many say they will share their people food with their pets and this may be perfectly fine in short-term situations.

In long-term scenarios, you should have stored pet food, and when that runs out, your pet can become a food source for your real family. Does your pet really mean more to you than your son or daughter? If your choice is not to eat your pet, then you should humanely dispatch the creature when your stored pet food is gone.

Under no circumstances should you ever just put your pet out to fend for itself. That pet is totally your responsibility, not anyone else's. Pets that are 'turned loose' often die a horrible slow death by starvation or the lucky ones are killed and eaten by other animals (or humans).

Even if living in the suburbs you can maybe grow some livestock right now. You could raise chickens for meat and/or eggs. You don't need a rooster to get eggs, and the rooster is the only loud one. You can also raise rabbits. They are obviously quiet and do not require very much room. Remember for any pet or livestock you also have to plan on their water supply also.

I have had to carry water to livestock on occasion and I can tell for a fact that water is heavy. If the power ever goes out and your water source is even fifty yards from your livestock, add a cart or other means to your preps to assist in moving the water rather than just carrying it.

Calories. If you are carrying water much distance, you will be burning through many calories. If you are walking many miles out hunting, you will be burning calories. Plan your food supply to your expected needs. If you will be inside your house hunkered down all day, every day then you will not need to consume as many calories per day. You could live on maybe a thousand calories. If you will be getting plenty of exercise then you might need three times as many calories and possibly even more than that each day.

No matter how much food I would have stored if I thought a long-term situation was at hand, I would buy as much more food as I could just before the event if I had advance notice. After water, food is the next most vital thing that you need in a long-term situation, and you will need way more food than you think.

It is difficult to stress the importance of having stored food. And don't forget things like spices, bullion, BBQ sauce, ketchup, salad dressing, salsa, salt (and add more salt because it has many uses), peanut butter, jelly, sugar, brown sugar, and many more add-on items (like a spare can opener). These are easy to forget, and while we can likely get by without most of them, they will certainly enhance our dining experiences while using up little extra space or much more money spent.

Often longer term storage food (or wild food) can be a little bland, but with a few of these things added, a good cook can make any of us want to eat it. As a forager, I can tell you from experience that while many wild plants are certainly edible in most cases, the application of your favorite salad dressing makes them much more edible.

An often missed large source of food

If you live in farming country, then you have very likely seen grain bins. Huge grain bins store an unbelievable amount of very edible grain. These bins are found near highways for ease of trucking or near railroad tracks for the same reason of shipping. Grain elevators store large amounts also, and those are common in towns and cities. Corn, oats, soybeans, and wheat are the common grains found in those bins. In most cases to use the grain best, you would need a grain mill. Or you could rub the grain between two rocks to make meal or flour. Or sprout the grain and eat the sprouts.

When food is gone farmers will still very likely have grain still stored in those bins on their farms and that grain could be purchased or bartered for from those farmers. In desperate times grain bins in remote locations could be opened and grain removed for personal use. This would obviously be stealing, but that would be a choice every person would have to make if they and their family were starving.

Opening a door or chute near the bottom of a full grain bin can be very dangerous and cause a very considerable amount of waste. The grain will flow out just like opening a hole in a dam that is holding back water. It can quickly flow over you and cause suffocation. Be very careful if you ever need to access this source of food. Accessing from the top is always the safest.

Sundry Items

These are non-food items we often don't think much about. Things that we buy only occasionally and often are quite inexpensive. Things like toothbrushes and toothpaste, hand soap, dish soap, shampoo, laundry soap, toilet paper, feminine items, aspirin, contact lens cleaner, Band-Aids, and more little things that we use and need and should stock up on along with the food. Some people prep a large supply of these items with the plan of using them for barter during bad times. These items may be quite cheap now but would have real value in a long-term situation.

The list of these sundry items is almost endless. We all use and depend on so many little things that we think nothing about now, but we would sorely miss them if we had to do without. Most of these items we automatically toss in our shopping carts without a second thought. Would life be harder for you if you had no more of those reading glasses? Add some to your preps. Make a list of all the little things and add to that list as you think of more. When writing this list, you can add pencils and paper to the list, so you have them to write the next list.

Long-term items to stock might also include a pressure canner along with canning jars and canning lids. If your long-term plan includes using food from a garden, you will need many canning jars and a whole lot of lids. If you have plans for being off grid and yet have a freezer available to use then remember to stock some freezer paper to wrap your meat along with the tape for it.

Salt is a valuable storage item that is very inexpensive to purchase. Meat can be salted and dried for non-refrigerated storage. Making jerky also requires salt. Salt adds flavor to almost all foods.

A food dehydrator can either be an electric one that you buy or a passive solar one that you build or buy. A dehydrator can allow you to store many foods without refrigeration. Dehydrated foods are also much lighter to carry if you do any on-foot traveling. Remember little things like zip lock bags in different sizes as we all know they have hundreds of uses and can be easily forgotten when prepping.

If you have never baked bread (and this means most people), then it is something to try now. After going without bread for a time, a loaf of home baked bread is a real treat. And yes home baked is often way better than the stuff you buy. Eating a piece of bread fresh and warm from the oven is an experience everyone should enjoy, both now and after a disaster.

If you own your own home, you could maybe plant fruit and/or nut trees now. They often take several years before they produce but can be a real asset to your food storage plan and require very little maintenance.

Also, have plans to cook your stored or acquired food. You will need pans and a way to heat the food. If you plan on a camp stove of some kind make sure you have extra fuel for it. Same if you plan on using your grill, either gas or charcoal. Store wood if you plan on using a wood fire for cooking. And for sure have several ways to light the fire. Cigarette lighters, matches, scratch igniters, a magnifying glass, or other choices to start a fire. Or all of those choices.

You cannot get around it; storing extra food costs money. But unlike some prep items, single food items are quite low priced, and so even on a very small budget, you can slowly but steadily add to your food stores. Even budgeting five dollars a week or month toward extra food will soon show results. The key to doing it with less money is to use coupons and only buy prep foods when they are on sale. And remember- only buy what you will eat!