

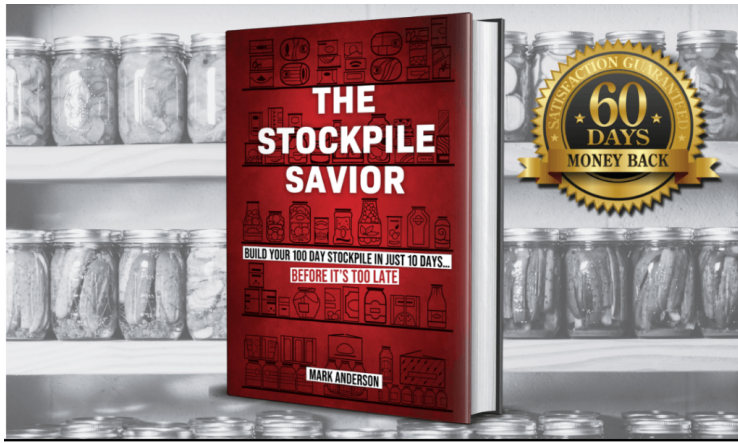
Rethinking Stockpiling

If there's anything the prepping community is known for, it's stockpiling supplies. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and the "great toilet paper shortage of 2020" began, many of us were sitting back, laughing at all the people lining up to get into the grocery stores. Some of us even went to see, stopping by on the way to work and sitting far off in the parking lot to see those poor suckers standing in line, hoping to get a pack of TP. It didn't even matter what brand, just as long as they got some.

The shortages of toilet paper and hand sanitizer quickly spread to other areas, as government lockdowns caused a quiet panic, and people emptied the grocery stores. For the first time in my life, I actually saw empty shelves and cases in the stores, just like the pictures that we've all used to talk about food running out and the stores being empty. It's like we had all gotten it right somehow.

While preppers had rooms full of food through all this, I ran into a surprising number who were complaining about the stores being empty. They didn't want to use their stockpile and wanted to be able to buy the fresh food they were used to eating. It was as if their stockpile was a trophy and the pandemic wasn't a real problem that was causing the stores to be empty.

We're now two years down the road, and the stores still aren't back to normal. Oh, they try to give an appearance of normalcy, spreading out the inventory of the items they do have to cover the gaps from things that are missing. But there are still quite a few products that are hard to find. In many cases, we're buying what we can rather than what we want to.



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On top of that, Russia and their ally Belarus control 40% of the world's potash supply, something essential to the manufacture of fertilizers. Here in the US, we import roughly 93% of our potash needs from Russia. What are we going to do now, with the war and current sanctions? How is that going to affect food production and costs? How much more inflation can we expect to see?

After the experiences of the last couple of years, coupled with these concerns about ongoing shortages, I've taken a step back to look at my stockpile. I'm not saying that I'm rethinking whether or not I need a stockpile, but rather I'm rethinking how I'm stockpiling. Considering that it looks like we're going to see a continued string of disasters happening all around us, I've decided to make some revisions to the way that I am stockpiling to ensure that I have enough of everything I need.

Don't Be Afraid to Use It

Considering that a pandemic was one of the scenarios which we all supposedly prepare for, it surprised me how many preppers were unwilling to go into their stockpile back in 2020. Perhaps their imagination had gotten in the way, as they were expecting any pandemic to come in a much more dramatic way. But we don't get to choose our disasters or choose how they come; we just have to be ready.

Using our stockpiles to survive COVID was a reasonable use of them, especially when the stores were running out of food. That's essentially what we stock all that food for. While a worse disaster might come across later, we've got to take care

of our families today.

One important thing here is to keep track of everything that you take out of your stockpile to know how much to buy to restock when that item becomes available again. With the current uncertainty in the supply chain, we might find ourselves working through and restocking some things several times over before things really stabilize back to normal.

In order to make sure that we can restock, we should set aside the cost of anything we remove from our stockpiles. That way, when it becomes available again, we are ready to buy. We won't have to wait for payday to roll around, letting others beat us to it.

Between the increased unemployment, payroll protection, and eviction moratoriums, there were a lot of people during the time that businesses were shut down who were doing better financially than they normally did when they were working their full-time jobs. But rather than save that money, they spent it on buying larger televisions and other frivolous things. Those people probably weren't preppers, but we want to make sure we don't fall into the same trap they did.

Add Frozen Food

One of the first things I did, was stockpile meat. That was a unique experience for me, as I've always maintained that a food stockpile should be non-perishable foods. But that stance was based on the idea that we would lose electrical power in a disaster. Well, we had a disaster, and we still had electrical power.

My wife and I had a field day at Sam's Club, buying up meat. I love their larger packages for the savings that they offer. We bought whole pork loins and cut them into chops; 10-pound chubs of ground beef became one-pound packages, large roasts split into two or three pieces, and whole briskets cut down as

well. Arriving home with all \$400 plus worth of meat home, we repackaged it in meal-sized bags, labeling and dating the bags for future reference.

We've gone through pretty much all that meat now, but have restocked, keeping our freezer full. While there is always a risk of losing all that meat, it looks like there's a greater risk of losing the supply chain bringing that meat to our local supermarket.

Just in case we do lose power, I've got two smokers; one is a grill/smoker combination, with the firebox off to the side, and the other is a cabinet-type unit. Between them, I can smoke our entire freezer full of meat in one 24-hour period of time if I have to. I've also got enough battery backup power to run the cabinet smoker for that time, as it is electric.

Review and Revise Appropriate Stocking Levels

It didn't take long for the stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer that many of us had to run out. I had a package of 50 N-95 masks, which didn't last me through. Instead, I ended up making cloth masks to use. Basically, I hadn't truly thought through how many masks I'd need.

Indiscriminate stockpiling isn't enough. We need to make sure that we stockpile in a way that has been thought out logically. That means taking the time for every single item, from matches to masks to canned chicken, and figuring out just how many we need to have in order to last us X amount of time. We can then multiply that by how long we expect that sort of disaster will last to determine just how much of an item we need.

Let me use toilet paper as an example. When my kids were

living at home, we'd go through one roll of toilet paper per day, on average. I know this because I would have to buy that much toilet paper. So, if I want a stockpile of toilet paper that would last my family for 90 days, I'd better have 90 rolls or more.

Ok, so what about something we've never used, like those N-95 masks? In cases like that, we need to find out just how long the masks are intended to be used. As a disposable mask, the N-95 is supposed to be replaced daily, although we have since found out that it is easy to reuse them. But that's information we didn't have at the beginning, so we would have to go on the one per day basis. Based on that, my one box of masks wasn't enough for my wife and me to get through a month. We should have had at least four boxes, assuming a 90-day pandemic.

This is the type of analysis we need to do on everything in our stockpile so that we can avoid running out of things in the future. How many things do you have that you haven't done that for? Let me give you a few ideas to start out with; things you definitely need to calculate your usage on:

- Fuel for heating
- Water filter cartridges
- Personal hygiene supplies (including sanitary napkins)
- First-aid supplies
- Dog food (if you have a dog)
- Baby diapers (if you have a baby)
- Medicines – both over-the-counter and prescription
- Firestarters
- Candles
- Batteries
- Fishing hooks and other easily lost fishing items
- Plastic bags
- Aluminum foil
- Lime

- Pest control
- Cleaning supplies

Short-Term Versus Long-Term Stockpiles

I would highly recommend splitting your stockpile into two parts, a short-term stockpile and a long-term one. We can think of the short-term stockpile as our pantry, off the kitchen. It should have enough food and other supplies to see your family through a short-term crisis, say a month to six weeks. If you have room for it, make it two months.

This is the part of the stockpile that you're going to be pulling from, dealing with supply shortages. As part of this exercise, it would be a good idea to take a page from the retail industry and develop what is known as "minimum stocking levels." Minimal stocking levels are the number of that item that you should have on hand at all times. They have to be enough to get your family through the four, six, or eight weeks that you're setting the pantry up for.

Remember when I was talking about using your stockpile earlier? Well, the idea is that I was talking about getting into only the short-term part of it. I don't think things ever got so bad that it would warrant getting into the long-term part of it. Nevertheless, if it did, getting into the long-term stockpile would be acceptable. But it would have to be noted so that it could be replaced.

Those minimal stocking levels I mentioned should either be marked on the shelf where the item is kept or on a form that you can use to take inventory before going to the grocery store. Using that form to take inventory of the pantry, you'll know exactly how much you have and what you need to buy to bring your stockpile up to snuff.

I've used a system like this for years, and with it, I can take 10 minutes to take inventory and then go through the grocery store in 30 minutes flat, from grabbing my cart to getting in the line at the checkout. When I get through, I'll have everything we regularly use, and I'll have enough of it to last us for two months.

Going to a grocery store that fast doesn't work for everyone, and there are times when it doesn't work for me either, as I want to look for other items which aren't on my inventory list. Things that we don't buy all the time or ingredients for something special I might want to make. So it's not a perfect system. But when I need to restock quickly, it can't be beaten.

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