What Survival Foods You Actually Need

If history is any guide, properly storing and securing food is the most important thing you can do to prepare for long-term, wide-scope volatility.

This article will include some of my survival foods top picks for various survival purposes.

General Survival Food Recommendations

First, I'll cover some correct principles of food storage that apply to all kinds of food storage.

Store Foods that Require Little to No Preparation

It's easy to gloss over this point when shopping for survival foods. Freeze dried foods require a substantial initial capital outlay, so most shoppers go straight to dry packed foods.

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It simply may not be feasible to cook food you've stored. Building fires under bugout conditions may not be safe or possible during a bugging out. Mass human migrations can strip the earth of food and fuel like giant army ants, so there may

not be any wood to burn. Sedentary populations have the same effect, defoliating terrain, turning furniture and wood flooring into firewood and even ripping the studs out of standing homes to use the wood for heating and cooking. Fire codes often prohibit survivalists from storing enough fuel to cook and heat a home for a year or more.

For these reasons, foods that require little or no cooking or other preparation are preferred. Store shelf-stable foods that that do not require cooking or intensive preparation before other types of food storage. One of the oldest lessons of survival is that foraging puts survivors into conflict with others who are competing for the same limited resources resulting in violence.

Storing Only One Type of Food Limits Your Options

There are many types of emergency food storage on the market today. So many different choices can be overwhelming to consumers, but once you recognize that compete for a limited number of niches, making choices becomes easier.

I am not a cheerleader for any one type of survival foods over all others because it is the adaptable who survive and storing only one type of food limits your options, whereas storing modules of different types of food increases the versatility and adaptability of your food supply, enabling survivors to adapt to volatility, change. Some foods are better for traveling long distances on foot and extreme cold weather, while others require little or no preparation, can survive temperature extremes or store for very long periods of time.

This survival philosophy embraces the fact that you cannot accurately predict the future as opposed to acting on bad information. Prepare this way and you'll be covered no matter what you magic eight ball tells you.

Food Storage Goals

You and I may have different goals relative to food storage, and so it should be. We probably have our own peculiar needs based on our health, threats, environments and missions and access to different information, so there typically isn't a "one-size-fits-all" food storage plan. What does apply to all of us is that we should begin with the end in mind.

How long do you want your food storage to sustain you? How many people will it need to sustain? Will others be showing up or will you need to group up with others who may not have food storage for reasons of security? Where will you be storing all this food? Do you plan to rotate through it or store it and forget it?

You may want three weeks of food per person or three years. You might plan to feed your nuclear family or a large group. You could store food figuring that it would be a major enticement to attract key personnel. Whatever the answers to these questions are, you'll save a lot of money and grief if you answer them before you get to far along in the process.

Don't Put All Your Eggs in One Basket

Even though this certainly one of the most important things that can be done to safeguard food storage, many survivalists fail to do it. Most create a large pantry, root cellar or dedicated food storage room and put nearly all their food storage in it. The danger is that it sets them up to lose it all in one shot, whether it be to fire, looting, a natural disaster or an artillery strike. I have talked to survivors who have lost the content of their home to all of the above, so don't think "it can't happen to you."

The solution is simple: Don't put all your food storage under the same roof! This rule applies to anything you consider to be mission-critical: certain documents, data, firearms, basic

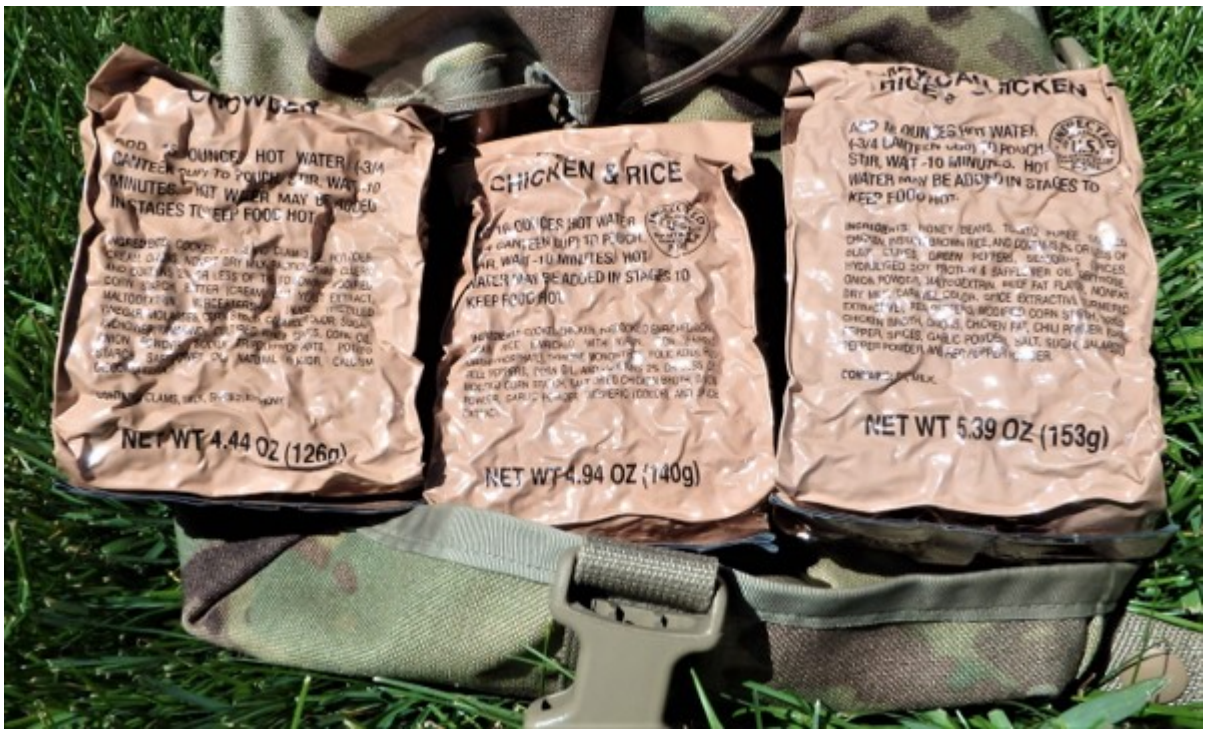
equipment, medication, food, water or water treatment gear, communications equipment and so on. That way, if you're forced to relocate or temporarily feign capitulation to a vastly superior enemy, you'll have the tools you need to start over.

Seem like a daunting prospect? Start small. Seal 4 #10 cans of food storage into a section of large diameter PVC pipe and buy it someplace safe. Do that a couple times a year and you'll soon have plenty of food socked away to get you started again or to help someone in need. Two cans of beans and one can of rice and a third of freeze-dried TVP or meat will store for decades if buried deep enough. If you have the money, load up 4 cans of freeze-dried food to a tube.

Bugout Foods

Bugout foods should be calorie-dense and should include foods that can be eaten along the trail without any preparation. As long as I can treat water along the route and heat water, I prefer freeze-dried foods because water weighs eight pounds per gallon.

MCW/LRP Ration Entrees



Caption: seafood chowder, chicken & rice & Mexican chicken & rice above are three of the MCW/LRP entrées but they also include bacon & eggs and other tasty options.

The best freeze dried food for backpacking that I have encountered is the MCW/LRP (Meal, Cold Weather/Long Range Patrol) entrée which is a freeze dried food (Mountain House has filled the contracts for all of the meals I've eaten) vacuum packed into blocks, which pack far better than the next best thing, which is the Mountain House Pro Pak, but they are vacuum packed into balls, which don't pack as well. Another difference between the two is that LRP/CW rations is that LRP/CW entrées include extra meat and larger 1540 kilocalorie portions in a ratio of 15% proteins/35% fats/50% carbohydrates to make sure soldiers on long range patrol or in cold weather have plenty of fuel to keep going and stay warm. This also makes them the best food I've found for long backpacking trips such as a bugout. This ratio bears some similarities to pemmican and you can always substitute pemmican or something similar if this is too expensive or difficult for you to obtain. I'm just sharing what works for me. You may want something different.

As for heating freeze dried food, there are quite a few options. You can use a backpacking stove, fuel tablets, heat water in MRE heaters using MRE hot beverage bags or you can build a fire. If you use a stove, you'll have to let it cool before you pack it up. In fact, you can just add room temperature water even if you can't heat it and you'll end with a meal similar to cold canned food, so don't get too hung up on having to heat water. It's not that big a deal.

Caption: Nine LRP/CW entrees fit neatly in a MOLLE II sustainment pouch leaving plenty of room for drink mix, Clif bars and ready to eat snack items.

As you can see in the pictures, the cube-shaped entrées pack perfectly into MOLLE II sustainment pouches, giving you a base of 13,860 kilocalories per pouch or a whopping 27,720 per set of two pouches. There is still plenty of room for to put a couple thousand calories of snacks and drink mixes in each pouch. Need more food for a longer trip? You can add more sustainment pouches or cache them in sustainment caches along bugout and get home routes.

Spices

Roman soldiers were paid partly in salt, and the latin root ‘sal’ became ‘salt’ in English. Salt and spices have been a valuable trade item throughout history for good reason and most people start including spices in their bugout bags after just a meal or two of unsalted freeze dried food or wild game. If you do or don’t see spices in the bugout bag of a survival group prospect, that is often a solid indicator of their level

of field experience. Javelina tastes about like it smells, but barbecued javelina tastes like barbecue sauce, and that applies pretty much across the board. You do the math. It's not easy to go from a modern western diet to living off the land and a few spices greatly ease the transition … at least at meal time.

Caption: Don't forget to pack spices!

MRES

You might have heard that you can only eat MREs for so long and then … (insert terrible gastrointestinal malady here.) In my experience, that's total bunk. I ate nothing but MREs for over six months straight and when went back to a "normal" diet (whatever that is) I missed some of the snacks and the convenience of popping an entrée in an MRE heater.

The bread crackers, peanut butter, cheese, snacks and drink mixes from MRES are useful as trail snacks and for times when you can't heat water for a hot meal, but because MRE entrées

contain so much moisture, they are heavy and spoil quickly at high temperatures. Because of these factors, I’m not a big fan of MREs for bugout use. Even in controlled temperatures, the entrees only last about five years. When storing MREs, understand that every ten degrees above 65 degrees Fahrenheit cuts the storage life in half, so they are best store at cool, stable temperatures. A summer knocking around in the back your truck in Arizona will do in an MRE entrée. On that note …

Food to be Stored in Vehicles

Automobiles, boats or aircraft are far from ideal food storage locations. They are subject to extreme temperature fluctuations, jostling, jarring and impacts. To survive this treatment, these foods must be low in moisture. Secure them so they don’t get bounced around and protect them from sunlight. Even the foods best suited to storage in vehicles should be inspected frequently for signs of spoilage and to ensure that container remain intact.

Low-moisture Lifeboat Rations

The foods that are best suited to this role are low-moisture lifeboat survival rations such as MayDay, Mainstay, Daytrex, Millennium Bars and my personal favorite, US military Food Packet, Survival, General Purpose.

Caption: (Left to right) Mainstay Emergency Food Ration, Millennium Bar and a Chocolate Chip Dessert Bar from a Food Packet, Survival, General Purpose.

Of the better low-moisture products on the market today, Mainstay went with a lemon/vanilla cookie bar. Daytrex has kind of a coconut taste. Millennium bars are nice because they come in a variety of flavors in smaller bars which is smart because after you eat a 400-calorie cookie bar three times a day for three days, starvation doesn’t sound quite so bad. Maybe they make them like this, so they’ll be easier to ration. “Hey, are you going to eat that? No, that’s OK, you can have it.”

Food Packet, Survival, General Purpose

Caption: Contents of a Food Packet, Survival, General Purpose, Improved. As you can see, the author got hungry and dug into one of the shortbread cookie bars and the wintergreen candies. Shooting pictures of survival gear can really work up an appetite.

Of the low-moisture survival rations, the military issue food packet is by far the more useful in a survival role. As you can see in the photo below, it includes five low moisture bars: chocolate chip dessert, cornflake, granola and two shortbread cookie bars, which are the best. Instead of a sixth bar, the packet includes a pack of wintergreen mint carbohydrate candies. Past packets have used Charms candies in this role. The food packet also includes an Herb Ox soup/gravy base which is very useful if you manage to bag something for your stewpot (but is low in sodium like the rest of the items so it won't provoke thirst) and a drink mix packet which is either iced tea or spiced cider.

They come packaged in a cardboard box and contain 1447 kilocalories all told in a ratio of 5% proteins/39% fats/56% carbohydrates with the objective of minimizing metabolic water requirements. If you happen to have plenty of water, you're going to wish it included some salt packets, so pack some salt with them.

Water for Storage in Vehicles

I don't store retort (foil) packed water or water packed in boxes in my vehicles because the packaging degrades over time, gets jostled around and starts leaking. Instead I store water packed in steel cans. Water packed in aluminum beer or soda-type cans will burst when it freezes, so you don't want that either. Get the white, 24 oz cans with blue lettering. They say they're good for 30 years but may last much longer. Tape a P-38 or P-51 can opener to the tops of a couple of the cans, maybe tape the cans together to they don't dent each other and store them in your vehicle survival kit with confidence.

Long-term Food Storage

OK, this is the big investment for survivalists … long-term food storage. You have choices, wet packed, dry packed, nitro-packed and freeze dried and I'll give you a few pointers on each.

Wet Packed Food Storage

Wet packing or canning foods in glass mason jars using the water bath method was the method used by my ancestors and I ate foods canned this way by my grandfather for at least a decade after he passed away. Home canned foods are a study in self-reliance. In most cases, we grew vegetables or fruits at home in the garden or orchard and canned the foods in a separate canning kitchen built specifically for the purpose.

Another type of wet packing is foods canned in "tin" (steel)

cans. Most American use at least some canned foods. The benefits are that you are probably used to at least some of these foods, and they can typically be eaten right out of the can or warmed in the can if you have the means to do so.

Canned foods are a great way to store shelf-stable cream, butter, processed cheese and dulce de leche. I recommend storing three months of shelf stable foods that you normally eat, *that don't require cooking*. Beyond that, begin storing dry packed and/or freeze-dried foods.

This is where someone invariably reminds you to not forget to stock a can opener with your canned foods. You might have seen the scene in The Pianist, where the protagonist is tormented by not being able to open a can of gherkins and almost gets himself killed. If you need to open a can of food and don't have a can opener, just plant the can firmly on a section of concrete sidewalk (or sandstone or a flat, porous rock or similar surface) apply a little pressure and move it back and forth. You'll wear down the seal in no time and the can comes right open. So now you know how to quickly and safely open a can without a can opener without a can opener.

Dry Packed Food Storage

Dry packed food storage is the packing of dry foods, such as grains or potato flakes, canned in #10 cans with an oxygen absorber packet. Depending on the food, it can last anywhere from five to thirty years or more when properly stored. Write dates on cans when you buy them if not marked with a manufacture date and print a list of expiration dates and keep with your food storage. Some brands print this information right on the label.

Dry packed foods are typically much less expensive than freeze dried foods and some of them store just as long so there is simply no sense in freeze drying foods like hard red winter wheat, sugar or salt. I recommend looking at the storage life of foods to determine where you should buy dry packed foods and where you might want to spring for freeze-dried foods. Storing foods with a very long shelf life eliminates much of the need to rotate foods. I store my foods grouped according to shelf-life and place the foods with shorter shelf life where they are easy to access so I don’t have to dig through my entire food supply every time something needs to be rotated.

I would be remiss in covering dry packed food storage if I did not mention LDS home storage centers. These are bulk cannery facilities run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (you may know them as Mormons) that dry pack food storage in (6) #10 cans to a case with oxygen absorbers. However they might feel about the LDS faith, few dispute that the Latter-day Saints have a lot of experience in the field of long-term food storage. LDS home storage centers typically include a couple of plastic lids per case, which come in handy to keep food fresh once the cans are opened. All are welcome at these facilities. You don’t have to be a member of the LDS faith to use them, they won’t try to covert you, you don’t have to give them a bunch of information. The prices are hard

to beat and with over 100 years of practice and millions of members, the LDS are undeniably knowledgeable about all things pertaining to food storage.

I still use my grandmother's wheat grinder, which is an electric model which can also be cranked manually if need be. I will never forget the smell of her fresh baked wheat bread filling the home and whole wheat toast with butter and home-canned apple or apricot preserves at the breakfast table. Contrasting home grown and made foods with food bought at grocery stores, it is plain to see that we gave up a great deal in the transition to "modern" life. I remember my grandmother complaining about store-bought tomatoes like it was yesterday and I still agree with her.

Nitrogen Packed Food Storage

Nitrogen packed foods are typically dry packed in #10 cans or buckets lined with Mylar bags that are filled with nitrogen gas before sealing them. Nitrogen is heavier than air and is

used to displace oxygen, so the theory was that it would lengthen storage life. In practice, however, I have noticed little difference in storage life between properly dry packed foods and nitro packed foods. This is probably due to the effectiveness of oxygen absorber packets.

Freeze Dried Food Storage

Freeze dried foods generally last up to thirty years although dairy product typically last less than twenty. If you want a “buy and forget” product, freeze-dried food is it. Freeze dried foods are also light weight and typically only require hot water to prepare. The downside is the cost. Freeze dried food storage can cost five or more times the cost of dry packed food storage.

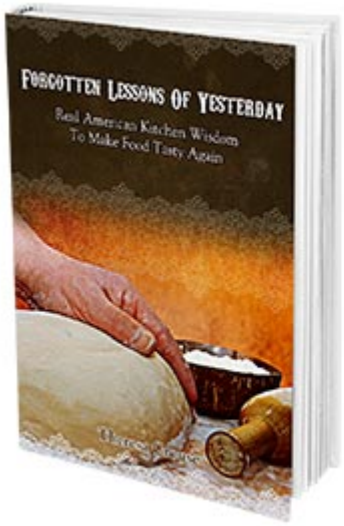
Hybrid Food Storage Plan

Many people want to know which type of food storage is best so

they can buy that. Maybe they are brainwashed to be brand-loyal, but fortunately, they don’t have to lock themselves into just one type of food storage. The more effective plan is to store a little of each to give you more options.

You can obtain most of the benefits of freeze-dried food storage by going with a hybrid food storage plan, which is what I have done. I have 90 days of normal shelf-stable foods and wet packed foods. Then I have less expensive dry packed foods with long storage life and bought freeze dried instead of dry packed for products that had shorter dry packed shelf life. Then I added additional dry packed and freeze-dried foods as I could afford it until I had the basics in place to survive for two years. (You certainly don’t have to do what I do. You may need more or less than I do.) Once I had the basics, I went back and filled in the gaps so that we could eat better than we would need to eat just to survive.

I hope you are able to make some aspects of your food storage a little more effective after having read this article.



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