

# How to Organize Your Emergency Food Storage

By Damian Brindle



*Image Credit: <https://pixabay.com/photos/root-cellar-canned-goods-settlers-4022024/>*

Food is usually one of the first things people think about during an emergency. When a disaster starts to unfold, you'll often find long lines at the grocery store as people make a frantic effort to stockpile food on short notice.

Building a long-term food supply in advance is an easy way to avoid this stressful scenario and keep yourself and your family safe in the event of an emergency. But as your emergency food storage begins to grow bigger, keeping it organized and fresh can be a major challenge. Here are several tips to keep your emergency storage well-stocked and organized at all times.

## Only Store What You Eat

One of the biggest mistakes that people make when building their emergency food supply is stockpiling foods that they're never going to eat. Sure, those freeze-dried food packets and MREs are nice to have on hand, but you probably (read: hopefully) won't get around to eating them. Instead of wasting money on food you'll never eat, stock up on canned and dry foods that will last for a year or so before you need to replace them.

While you're at it, be sure to keep a full fridge stocked with healthy food. If the power goes out, you can simply transfer your meat and dairy products into an insulated cooler packed with ice and eat those items first.

[Editor's note: it's probably best to purchase a quality inverter and use your vehicle to power the refrigerator and/or freezer for most short-term scenarios. You'll need a long heavy-duty extension cord too if you don't already have one, and some gasoline stored as well which is a good idea in general for emergency preparedness purposes.]

## **Choose the Right Location**

Before you begin stockpiling food, think about where you will store your growing pile of food. While your kitchen pantry may be suitable for your short-term emergency food supply, it probably won't be big enough to hold your long-term supply.

The ideal environment for a long-term emergency food supply is someplace cool, dry and dark, like a basement or maybe an air-conditioned garage. That way, your food won't go bad prematurely by sunlight, humidity or warm temperatures. But if your garage isn't air-conditioned then avoid using the area unless you have no other choice. The same can be said for an attic or crawl space.

[Editor's note: If you're truly short on space, you'd be surprised at how much can be stored even in a small closet if you organize things right. Consider the advice I give in my book on prepping for apartment or condo dwellers if you have such a dilemma.]

## **Use Heavy-Duty Shelving**

While you don't need to spend a ton of money building up an emergency food supply, one thing you should invest in is decent shelving. In addition to keeping your food up high and out of the way of a water leak and some pests, heavy-duty shelves can maximize your storage space.

Metal shelves (and some heavy-duty plastic shelves) are a great choice because they're strong and usually easy to clean in the event of a spill or a leak. Still, make sure that your shelves can handle the weight that you're putting on them. Food buckets and canned goods can be surprisingly heavy! The last thing you want is to find your precious food in a huge mess on the floor because your shelves couldn't support their weight.

## **Buy or Make a Rotating Rack**

Another common mistake that people often make with their emergency food supply is stockpiling canned goods and then allowing them to go bad in their pantry. That's money down the drain, not to mention a huge waste of food.

The solution? Make a rotating can rack. Cheap and easy to store, a rotating can rack ensures that your emergency food supply is always fresh by keeping your oldest canned goods (i.e., goods with nearing expiration dates) in the front and the newest canned goods in the back.

Not only does a rotating can rack keep your emergency food supply well-organized, it's also incredibly affordable. You can get a basic rotating can rack for less than \$40.

[Editor's note: These are easier to buy, in my opinion. I've used these Shelf Reliance canned food racks for years without complaint; know that you're probably going to need more than one set if you store any amount of canned food whatsoever.]

## Keep a Spreadsheet

When your emergency food supply is running on a rotation system, it's important to stay on top of what you have. After all, you wouldn't want to discover after an emergency that you don't have nearly as much food in your emergency supply as you thought, especially if you start storing food all over the house.

So, what's the best way to manage your inventory? One affordable idea is to keep track with an Excel spreadsheet. You can include things like which shelf the item is located, the expiration date and the number or quantity of the item.

This may sound a little nerdy or extreme. But it's honestly a great way to ensure that your emergency food supply is stocked and ready in case the worst happens; the only problem is that you need to keep up with it or else the data will become obsolete quickly.

[Editor's note: I can tell you from personal experience that I've tried this with varying degrees of success. Long term food storage foods (because they're used less often) tend to work well with keeping lists. Day to day foods, like canned goods, are less amenable to this effort. Just use food storage racks and keep on top of what you have in your pantry and you'll be fine.]

## Additional Organization Tips

Here are a few more organization tips for your emergency food storage:

- **Group similar items together.** To find items more easily, keep similar items together. For instance, keep canned beans and vegetables together, dried mixes on another shelf and so on.
- **Label everything.** Figuring out the contents of a mystery freezer bag is annoying. Save yourself the frustration by labeling everything with a Sharpie, and be sure to include expiration or "use by" dates.
- **Add shelves to unused spaces.** If you have an unused corner in your pantry, install shelves and to make additional room for storage.

- **Keep tote bags ready to go.** Tote bags are easy to grab in case you need to bug out fast. If you don't have much room in your vehicle for a bunch of tote bags, consider getting a rooftop cargo carrier to free up space, though you're not going to want to use it for canned goods and most food as that will be too heavy. Use it for lighter items, like clothing and sleeping bags.
- **Store food in Mylar bags with oxygen absorbers.** Skip the Ziploc bags for food storage. Instead, use mylar bags in various sizes. They'll help extend your food's shelf life by providing added protection against oxygen intrusion, humidity and light exposure. You can use them in combination with 5-gallon buckets and lids to extend longevity. Remember to date this food too with the packed-on date.

## Creating a System That Works for You

Building long-term food storage is about more than just buying a bunch of non-perishable items at the last minute and hoping for the best. It's the slow accumulation of foods that you eat every day, so you can be better prepared in case of an emergency. Though it may require a little more time and organization prowess, the peace of mind your food storage provides will be well worth the effort.

Also, remember to take advantage of deals. That is, if the grocery store is offering a "buy one, get one" deal take it! And if you can shop at wholesale food stores, like Costco or Sam's Club, then all the better. You'll save money on building your long-term food storage and have more foods that you already eat too.

That brings up one last point: don't go overboard here. I know it's tempting to want to buy as much as you can if you're fearful of the worsting coming to pass, but you could come to regret it. For example, if you end up purchasing dozens of bags of pasta because it's on sale but don't include plenty of pasta sauce to go along with it, odds are that you're not going to make use of the pasta at a later date. Having something "just to have it on hand" isn't necessarily the best idea. Take your time, plan things out, and keep on top of your pantry and you'll be that much happier if or when there's trouble.

Retrieved from <https://rethinksurvival.com/organize-emergency-food-storage/>