



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Healthier Food Storage

As we start heading into our seasonal holiday celebrations, so much has changed and is being reinvented. Still some things likely remain the same. For instance: **There will probably be leftovers!** And food being carried from home to home. And perhaps reorganizing of kitchens to prepare for guests.

And so ... we'll need good food containers! But how can we choose ones that keep petroplastic toxics out of our food, beverages, and bodies — to protect our health and our families?

I've previously explored how plastic is getting into our food, and the fact that toxic plastic components such as BPA are being regularly found in our bodies. (Eeps!) I also described how we can systematically identify and reduce the plastics in our food.

In this article I'll explore one aspect in more depth: how to choose better storage containers. (Psst, these containers can also make great gifts, to support the health of people you care about! Or to put on your own holiday wish list!)

Choosing Containers Wisely

1) STRONGLY AVOID: Soft plastic containers. These easily release toxics into food and beverages. When you press on them, they go in softly and often have a stinky smell. They can have a variety of recycling codes, or none.

2) BETTER: Hard plastic containers. These can be



acceptable if needed, for instance, to carry lunch, gallons of water, or children's meals. Look for the recycling code 5 on the bottom (which means that it's polypropylene). A code 7 is OK *only if* it also says "BPA-free." However be aware that "BPA-free" products can still have other toxics inside. It helps a lot if the product label also says "phthalate-free."

3) BEST MATERIALS: You can mix and match for your different needs.

■ Glass. Glass offers many benefits for food storage. It's non-porous, so it doesn't absorb food, germs, or smells. It won't stain or get misshapen (as plastic can). You can easily see what's inside. Sturdy glass can usually go into your dishwasher and sometimes into your microwave (if it has no metal, for instance). Glass is easy to reuse again and again, and tends to last longer than plastic, reducing total cost. And it can be recycled endlessly without loss in quality or purity. (Plastic quality often degrades quickly with recycling.)

Glass can have its downsides. Its containers can sometimes be heavier than plastic, and/or break more easily if dropped. This can be an issue when traveling, or being used by children or slightly clumsy people (like me!).

You can find a wide range of glass jar styles in home stores, kitchen stores, and thrift stores.

You can also reuse glass jars from your food products (such as pasta sauce).

I personally love storing food in Mason jars (aka Ball or Kerr jars). They're much less likely to break, and they

Local Toxics Disposal

■ **To discard your household toxics safely, bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility.** It's at 500 Mecham Road, between Cotati and Petaluma, and is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 7:30am to 2:30pm.

■ **Check the Zero Waste Sonoma website** (www.zerowastesonoma.gov) for more information on this, or to see what city HHW Collection Events are currently scheduled. Or call 707/565-3375 or 707/364-6927.

come in various useful sizes, so I can always get more and they all look good together. They're usually priced well. There are two standard lid sizes (Regular and Wide Mouth), which makes lid storage easier.

I've used these for many foods, including cereals, flours, grains, beans, olives, nuts, teas, dried fruits, and candies. I even use them to make refrigerator herbal tea, helping me consume healthy beverages. They're also commonly used for food gifts!

TIP: You can get various specialty lids for these jars. For instance, for frequently accessed foods, I use a hard plastic lid to replace the two-part canning lid. I feel that its reuse benefit warrants a little plastic. There are also lids for kefir, kombucha, fermenting, sipping, and more. Be sure to check the materials!

■ **Ceramic. There are three types of ceramic. Porcelain**, or fine china, which is very hard, shiny, and often white. **Stoneware**, which looks like smoothed stone and is similarly durable. And **earthenware**, which looks earthy, but can chip easily and must be glazed for food use. If buying the latter two, check that they're food-safe and lead-safe, and follow the use and cleaning instructions.

You'll often find ceramic in classic countertop food canisters used for staples like flour, sugar, tea, etc. If these get damaged, you generally can't recycle them. So then look for ways to artistically reuse them. Even pieces can go into mosaics!

See *Healthier Containers*, over

Healthier Containers, continued

■ **Stainless steel (SS).** I was delighted when an expert mentioned a while back that SS is another healthier option. I hadn't realized that some useful products have emerged in this category!

Stainless steel is lightweight, making it easy to bring along. It's non-porous, thus avoiding staining and odors. It's durable, long-lasting, and can be stored in a freezer or fridge. It's usually oven and dishwasher safe (check the labels). It can be recycled endlessly.

One downside is that SS is not microwaveable. It can also be more expensive, but its longevity can balance that out. You also can't see inside, unless you have a clear silicone lid (which some of the U-Konserve SS containers do!)

■ **Food-grade silicone.** I've been wondering for a while about silicone in kitchen products, so I was glad to research it for my prior article. **I was even happier to discover that "food-safe" silicone (aka platinum-grade) is consistently found to be non-toxic and safe,** even when heated. **Like plastic, silicone can take different forms** (from malleable to hard), but it skips the BPA, lead, and phthalates.

Plus it's non-stick, non-staining, odorless, easy to clean, and long-lasting. It's lightweight, so it's easy to transport. It can go in a microwave, oven, freezer, and dishwasher. If cared for well, it won't leak, hard-

en, crack, peel, crumble, dry out, rot, or become brittle over time.

Silicone storage products include container lids, reusable baggies, stretch bowl covers and suction lids (used instead of plastic wrap).

TIP: Look for products labeled "food-grade" or "platinum." This helps ensure that they don't have other materials inside.

Note that silicone, while very stable, is not completely inert. Small amounts can leach over long periods. So I'm personally not comfortable boiling it. And I'd be cautious before using silicone bottle nipples or pacifiers (because of a baby's sensitivity and the longer exposure time). If you use them, look for medical grade silicone.

Silicone can be recycled, through specialized companies. It does persist in landfills. Still, I think that replacing lots of toxic plastic bags with one long-lasting non-toxic reusable silicone bag is clearly a net gain!

Overall Tips

1) On all containers, evaluate the lids! Apply the same principles of avoiding plastic, most importantly soft plastic. Better lid choices include glass, metal, and wood, with rubber or silicone gaskets.

2) Get lids with a tight seal. This helps keep food fresh, preserve flavor, and block insects.

3) Read your product labels for use and care specifics! Important details can vary notably.

4) Label your containers to avoid confusion. You can write or computer print product names on sticky labels, or onto paper secured with scotch or packaging tape. A permanent marker will often write on hard plastics. You might also note cooking information. For instance, I taped my tabouli recipe on my bulgur wheat jar, to keep it handy.

For more time-saving purchase and usage tips, see my HC webpage. It includes this article, a link to the prior one, and **juicy specifics about which local stores carry what products that meet these criteria.** (www.healthyworld.org/HC.html)

Please feel free to share your tips with me! What works for you in skipping the plastic in your food and beverage containers?

And remember, you don't need to do it all at once. Just step by step!

Detoxing Update

I have good news on a topic in our last edition. The current EPA has directed the removal of the toxic insecticide chlorpyrifos ("chlor-PEER-ruh-fohs") from food grown in the U.S. for U.S. markets. This process was started by the EPA under President Obama because of the clear evidence of its harm. The process was halted by the prior president's EPA. However nonprofits and the courts got it back on track, and now this EPA has completed the task. Yay team! **Be sure to celebrate our successes, to encourage constructive action towards our next goals!**

Note that chlorpyrifos can still be used on non-food crops such as ethanol corn, seed and sod crops, flowers, and ornamental plants. This means that it can still be on these plants — and drift and harm farmers, people in agricultural areas, and water supplies. **It can also be used for exported food.**

I invite you to support the nonprofits that are pressing the EPA to ban those uses too (see PANNA, below). The EPA is reviewing this and plans to report next year.

SOURCES: www.panna.org/press-release/epa-withdraws-all-food-uses-chlorpyrifos-advocates-celebrate • www.panna.org/blog/unfinished-business-completing-chlorpyrifos-ban

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ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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