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Pare Down Your Food Container Collection



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If you're packing up leftovers, plastic is fantastic, but when it comes to storing food-storage containers, you can sometimes have too much of a good thing. Take stock and pare down your inventory.

- Make sure every container has a lid. If one doesn't, get rid of it.
- Toss (or recycle) margarine tubs and deli containers, which "are made for cold food storage, not microwaving," says Jennifer Killinger, director of outreach for the American Plastics Council, in Arlington, Virginia. They won't stand up to repeated use or hot water.
- Throw out anything that is warped, won't seal tightly, or has burned spots or cracks. Items that have begun to melt will probably melt more the next time you heat food in them, and you could burn yourself, says David Kusuma, vice president of product development for Tupperware.
- To prolong the life of a container, Kusuma and Killinger suggest using it only as specified. Don't put it in the dishwasher or the microwave unless it's labeled as safe for those machines.

So how many food-storage containers do you need, anyway? Chef Debra Ponzek, author of *The Family Kitchen* cookbook (Clarkson Potter, \$25, www.amazon.com) and a mother of three, has the perfect recipe for a family of four or five. She suggests keeping a dozen identical 16-ounce containers on hand for leftovers. You'll never run out, and you'll never have to search for the proper lid, since one size fits all.

Clear containers work best because, of course, they let you see what's inside. And when they're all the same size, they stack neatly in the refrigerator (with the lids on) and in the cupboard (with the lids off).

Ponzek says you should also have two or three larger rectangular

containers (approximately eight by four inches) for big-batch meals, like lasagna and stew. If you do a lot of cooking ahead of time, you'll need more.

Consider keeping a few supersize containers stashed away for holiday leftovers and giant batches of cookies.

Written by Melinda Page and Ashley Tate

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