STORING FOOD

(FOR THE NEW, THE NERVOUS, AND THE NOT QUITE READY)

By Sharon Astyk

PROJECT ONE – TEA AND LISTS

I give you official permission to use another beverage if you prefer, but get a drink, tell the kids to go outside and play, the spouse that you are busy, get a pen, and give yourself a little quiet time before you begin rushing madly off in all directions (and yes, I do know how hard it is to find the time – I've got a million children, remember 😉?) Put on some music, breathe deeply, put your feet up, and relax a little.

All of the first projects under this heading involve drinking something and having time to think. So wait until you've got them, and come into this not in a panic "I've got to get food now!" but calmly.

You are going to sit down and list (on the next page) 4 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 4 dinners and 4 snacks that use mostly ingredients that can sit on a pantry shelf or come out of your garden and *that your family likes*. They don't have to be complicated – in fact, ideally they won't be. If you can't think of enough of each, begin thinking through the recipes you make regularly, and asking "could I adapt this – that is, could it use shelf stable tofu instead of the fresh stuff, could I try it with kale instead of spinach in the late fall."

You can get seasonal about it, listing separate meals for different seasons, but if that seems overwhelming, just focus on four basic meals that everyone will eat – pasta with tomato-garlic sauce, your best dal recipe, stuffed wontons…whatever.

This will be the basis of your first food storage projects – you are going to build up enough of the ingredients to be able to make these meals easily, without going to the store. These are things you will eat anyway. These are things that will save you time, if you don't have to run out when you need the ingredients. This is not a commitment to anything strange or weird – it is just shopping ahead. So figure out how many times you want to be able to make these meals.

Let's say you get the ingredients to do each of them four times (and if money is tight, it may take some weeks to gradually add a little extra to your cart) – by then, you'll have 16 days of food you like in the house without much extra worry. If you can get case or bulk discounts, you will probably even save some money. And it is food you are going to eat anyway. If you are ambitious, and no one has interrupted you, make the grocery list(s).

Meal Lists

Breakfasts

1.	2.
3.	4.

Lunches

1.	2.
3.	4.

Dinners

1.	2.
3.	4.

Snacks

1.	2.
3.	4.

Stray Thoughts & Notes

Ingredients Needed For Pantry Meals

TO KEEP ON HAND AT ALL TIMES – THERE ARE FOUR CHECKBOXES SO YOU CAN TRACK THE FOUR HELPINGS OF EACH INGREDIENT YOU NEED FOR EACH MEAL

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Project two – Finding Space (Eventually)

Now you are going to get up and walk around your house. Because the next project is finding some space for food storage. Now buying a few extra ingredients probably won't require you to do any major rearranging, unless you have a miniscule kitchen. Even then, you should be able to fit a lot of this food in the cupboards if you do some rearranging.

I've included a chart on the next page that should help you determine what can be stored where.

Now is the time to sort through the cupboards, move the stuff you don't use that often, consider getting rid of things. You know how the nesting bowls always get cluttered because you only use the bottom two regularly, so the little ones are all over the place, and how your baking area has six little heart shaped tart pans that you use once a year, if that… that stuff can get moved to a different place, odds are. We have the sense that all like things must go together in a kitchen, but this was not actually laid down as law anywhere I know of.

But if your goal is to get more food than just your meal list, you'll need space for it. So now is the time to begin looking. How are you fixed for closet space? Could anything be packed up and moved around (remember, if you haven't used it in a while, you probably could move it). Are you storing any junk (and no, it doesn't count if all the "junk" belongs to your partner, and your stuff is "good stuff" that is absolutely needed – first rule of decluttering is "you've got to get rid of some of your own stuff.") Is there anything that could be given away or sold?

What about under the bed? What about the basement? What about up along the top of the kitchen cabinets? What about your bedroom? Just because it is food, doesn't mean it has to live in the kitchen. Ideally, what you want is a pantry space – so now is the time to establish one. What will you need? Do you need shelving? Need to rearrange furniture? Need to build something? Have a yard sale? Again, don't do it, make a list. There's still one more step.

Possible Storage Spots:

WHERE TO STASH YOUR STASH*

	WARM	COOL	UNCONTROLLABLE TEMPERATURE
DRY	**UNDER BED, BEHIND COUCH, CLOSETS, TOP OF KITCHEN CABINETS** ✓ SQUASH ✓ PUMPKIN ✓ SWEET POTATOES ✓ CANNED GOODS	**PANTRY WITHOUT DIRECT SUNLIGHT** ✓ DRIED BEANS ✓ BUCKETS OF GRAINS ✓ PASTA ✓ BAKING STUFF ✓ ANYTHING DRIED OR DEHYDRATED	**ATTIC, UNINSULATED STORAGE BUILDING** ✓ FOOD STORAGE EQUIPMENT ✓ BUCKETS ✓ FOOD PRESERVATION EQUIPMENT ✓ LAUNDRY SUPPLIES ✓ PADS, TAMPONS
DAMP		**BASEMENT, CELLAR** ✓ CARROTS ✓ POTATOES ✓ ONIONS ✓ GARLIC ✓ BEETS ✓ APPLES, PEARS ✓ ALL STORAGE VEG EXCEPT THE ONES YOU NEED TO STORE WARM AND DRY	
UNCONTROLLABLE HUMIDITY		**SOME BASEMENTS** ✓ CANNED GOODS ✓ MOST STORAGE VEG	**OUTSIDE UN-INSULATED SHED OR PORCH** ✓ SOME STORAGE VEG CAN LIVE OUT HERE AS LONG AS THE TEMPS DON'T GO TOO WILD

IF YOU DIDN'T ALREADY KNOW, MARIJUANA LIKES TO BE STORED IN DRY PLACES WITHOUT DIRECT SUNLIGHT. STICK IT WITH YOUR BEANS AND OATMEAL.

PROJECT THREE - IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Now you're going make another cup of tea or other preferred beverage and answer some questions. You may want to run these questions by other members of your family, or you may not, but the idea is to help you figure out what you want. You don't have to write the answers, although you might want to.

1.**What am I storing food for?** What are my concerns? What kinds of situations are likely in my region?

2. **How much food do I want to store?** For how many people? For how many pets? How much water do I want to store? Am I likely to have people outside my immediate household who are with us in a crisis? Are there other things I want to store – clothing, medical supplies, tools? What are they?

3. **How much time and energy do I have to devote to this?** How much space do I realistically think I have to devote to this? How much money can I spend each week/month on this project. What are my biggest constraints (ie, is my family not supportive, am I working long hours, are there no good sources of bulk food near me?) How might I overcome them?

4. **Where will my stored food come from?** How much of it will I grow/produce? What are my goals for food preservation? How much of my food will I buy, and from where? What can I get locally, and what do I have to get through the industrial food system? What's the best and most ethical source for my food? Remember, every dollar you spend is a vote – if you spend it at an industrial source, you say "great, do more of this" – if you spend it locally, you say the same thing to your local farmer. Now, it is safe to say that every one of us buys some food through the industrial system, and some of us don't have the money or the access to do more than get their food any way they can. Those people are off the hook – but if you have *any* discretionary food income, you need to think a little about the votes you are casting when you buy food. Also, how can I use my food storage to save money and time?

5. **What do I imagine doing with my food storage?** Do I want it mostly to provide a hedge against a future crisis, or for day to day use right now? Do I imagine myself eating regularly out of it and replacing it? Do I think I will be less able to buy food later? Do I want to be able to share with others, or is my first priority protecting my own? How will I prevent loss of food to age, insects, mold? What's my plan for making sure the older food gets eaten regularly and that I'm adding more food as I go – food is not like antiques, it doesn't get better with age.

How much am I and my family prepared to adapt our eating habits so that we get the most out of our food storage – that is, we save the most money, we make fewer trips, we always have food to hand, as well has having a reserve?

6. Finally, ask **"Do I have to do this all alone?"** How can I get others – from my own family to my neighbors and my town or city involved in the project of becoming more food secure? How can I see my own food security as part of a larger community project. Do I have neighbors who might be interested in forming a buying club, a coop or simply in a "stocking up" club? Do I have friends who would like to share the work of preserving? Are there people in my community who could benefit from food storage – can I get them involved? Should my community have a reserve of food on hand in case of a crisis – can I bring this up with my municipality? What about water – does my community have water pumping stations for when the power is out? Could they be established? Are there community resources I don't know about – gleaning programs, bulk buying groups, community kitchens, food preservation classes, friends with the same interests. What's out there?

And what's in here? Is my family supportive? Neutral? Hostile? Are there ways to get them on board? How did I approach this issue, if they aren't interested in participating - could I approach it differently, with a emphasis on saving money, or on likely short term emergencies (hurricanes, blizzards, power outages) in ways that would be less scary than the way I came at it? Can I involve my husband, my wife, my partner, my kids, my parents, my friends? Can I get them excited about helping with the menus, picking out things to store, building projects, saving money, working together as a family?

Ok. Now that you are done drinking tea, and probably have to pee 😉, you can stop. That's enough for today – I know you are all excited, and I can't stop you from running off to reorganize the kitchen and buy 60 cans of tomatoes, but I'd encourage you to stop here, and leave some stuff for tomorrow, so you'll remain enthusiastic, rather than getting exhausted and overwhelmed. Although if you really, really can't stand waiting to reorganize a kitchen, you are welcome to come over and do mine.

Stray Thoughts & Notes

Squirrel Math: Stocking Up On Any Budget

I Have…

$0-10 extra dollars per week

Use this list to add one or two things to your shopping list each week. Get through the whole list, and then start over in a rotation. Don't be afraid to adjust your order of purchases if good sales come up.

- ✓ an extra package of shelf-stable high protein food (canned fish, shelf stable tofu, canned beans, powdered eggs, canned chili or beef stew)
- ✓ an extra package of some carbohydrate you eat (pasta, rice, polenta/masa, oatmeal)
- ✓ vegetables that store well in a house: sweet potatoes, winter squash, cabbages, onions
- ✓ some shelf stable dairy or faux dairy
- ✓ a canned, jarred or dried fruit you will eat
- ✓ oil

In addition to this list, contact your local food pantry. If you qualify for their regular distribution, take it. You can also ask if there are any items they struggle to unload – dried beans can be difficult for many people to use, leaving few takers. The pantry may be glad to have you take them off their hands, even if you don't qualify to be a regular client.

If you have kids, sign them up for any food programs through school. The food they get sent home with over the weekend won't always be the best quality, but it can help you build reserves.

$10-25 extra dollars per week

It might be tempting to look at the above list and say, "I can buy all those things in one week, especially if some of them are on sale!" That's not the worst idea, but if you have a little more money, you can start to use the advantages of buying things in bulk. Stick with one item a week, but look for opportunities to by that item in bulk.

$25-50 extra dollars per week

Okay, friend, we are definitely in bulk-buying mode. Once you've got a round or two of the staples, you can even take a week off to think about infrastructure – how are you storing this stuff? How are you making sure you're EATING your stash instead of letting it sit around waiting for the apocalypse?

This is also the point at which you can begin thinking beyond the absolute basics. In addition to everything listed above, consider these items for your stash:

- ✓ tea and/or instant coffee
- ✓ snack foods
- ✓ salt, spices and vinegars
- ✓ sweet stuff: sugar, honey, maple syrup, molasses

$50+ EXTRA DOLLARS PER WEEK OR ONCE YOU HAVE A FEW ROUNDS OF STAPLES IN STORAGE

This is where it starts to get really fun. On top of everything in the previous lists, now we get to start thinking about other people. Is there anyone in your neighborhood or family who might use infant formula? Items for special diets? Is there someone in your circles with intense food/sensory needs who might actually go hungry unless they have the correct brand of animal crackers? This is your chance to think outside your needs and start thinking about taking care of folks around you.

This is also the point at which you may want to consider methods of preservation that are more equipment-intensive and expensive. You can buy a pressure canner and a ton of jars and make your own canned beans or shelf-stable soups. Buy a dehydrator make lots of dried vegetables and herbs. The world isn't anyone's oyster at the moment, but you've got some room to try things, make mistakes and learn.

THINGS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS:

- ✓ infant formula (2-3 options)
- ✓ baby food
- ✓ gluten-free foods
- ✓ comfort foods (never underestimate the power of a shared candy bar in trying times)
- ✓ ensure or other meal replacement drinks
- ✓ Gatorade or other electrolyte drinks

- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____

Weekly Prep Schedule For People With No Time:

Week 1

- ✓ Make your meal and pantry lists.
- ✓ Add a few things to your regular shopping list. Set aside $2-20 for a future stock-up trip.

Week 2

- ✓ Do your where-to-store-it walk-through.
- ✓ Create ONE (1) new storage space and put something in it. Roll a cabbage under your bed. Stick some beans behind the couch. Start a list of where you're stashing things, including the date you stashed them, and put it on the fridge.
- ✓ Add a few more things to your regular shopping list. Set aside $2-20 for a future stock-up trip.

Week 3

- ✓ Reach out to at least one other person about your food storage plans. This person can be someone you share ideas with, or someone who you might support with food in a crisis. Use the questions from Project Three to shape your conversation.
- ✓ Create ONE (1) new storage space and put something in it. Add to list of where you're stashing things, including the date you stashed them.
- ✓ Have you eaten at least two of the things you've shopped for in the last 3 weeks? If not, reconsider your list and see whether they're things you actually eat on a regular basis.
- ✓ Add a few more things to your regular shopping list. Stash them in one of your new spots. Set aside $2-20 for a future stock-up trip.

Week 4

- ✓ Now that you've gotten some practice buying and storing stuff, dig deep into the questions in Project 3.
- ✓ Keep your eye out for sales on items you know you need, and use your "future-stock-up" money you've been saving to go after them in bulk when they go on sale.
- ✓ Reach out to your neighbors or extended family. Tell them about your project and ask about their special food needs, if any.
- ✓ Keep going. Keep shopping, keep storing, and keep eating.