

Beat: Lifestyle

## Vacuum Sealing Foods is For Everyone, Not Just Gardeners

### Dealing with Rising Food Costs

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**USPA NEWS** - Home vacuum sealers have been available to consumers for almost 40 years. They offer a convenient way to store foods that reduces waste, freezer burn and significantly lengthens the time food can be stored over conventional means.

Foodies appreciate them because food simply tastes better using this storage technique. In addition to these benefits, this article makes the case that vacuum sealing can be a core part of adapting a greener, more environmentally kind lifestyle.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, Americans throw out the unbelievable amount of 34 million tons of food a year . This is the second largest category of material waste we generate after paper products. Even more incredible is the fact that only three percent of this was recycled for compost or other uses but that is a topic for another article. What do home food vacuum sealers have to do with this?

#### Vacuum Sealers Minimize Waste

The primary way a home vacuum sealer benefits the environment is to minimize wasted food. We waste food in a number of small but accumulating ways from purchase through consumption, all of which a vacuum sealer can help with. Here are some examples.

Food can be purchased in bulk quantities and vacuum sealed for long term storage. This minimizes the packaging, transport energy and cost of buying food in typical single or small portion quantities. This is true of almost all foods from dry goods like spices to produce. How many times have you purchased large plastic bags of salad only to throw out a significant amount because the greens spoil before you can eat them. A vacuum sealer can help even with this problem.

Food can be cooked in large quantities and then frozen in vacuum sealed packaging for later use. Gardeners know how frustrating it can be to have their food crop ripen all at once and watch much of it go to waste. Along with drying and canning, vacuum sealing can help you use all the food you harvest. Canning is of course one even more environmentally friendly, as canned foods can be stored on a shelf, saving even the energy required for freezing. However frozen vacuum sealed foods can preserve a higher percentage of their initial nutritional content than canned foods will.

Vacuum sealed and refrigerated or frozen leftovers can be used for future meals long after they were originally cooked.

Refrigerated foods normally stored for a few days will last conservatively 2 to 3 times longer if vacuum sealed between uses. This might sound like it would be more trouble than its worth but with a method I describe below it isn't.

In hot, humid climates the shelf life of dry goods is greatly increased through vacuum sealing.

#### Plastic Sealing Bags are Not as Wasteful as They at First Might Appear

When most people think about vacuum sealers they picture food being stored in plastic, either from a roll or a bag and traditionally that's how most vacuum sealers are used. There are now some greener alternatives to this method that I will cover in a moment but first consider the following:

Food stored in plastic from rolls can be resealed and reused until the stored food is completely used. Bags not used for raw meat can be washed in a dishwasher and reused.

#### Vacuum Sealing Canning Jars

Some sealing machines allow owners to vacuum seal mason jars. These are commonly available, environmentally practical, glass jars used for canning and can be washed and reused indefinitely. Nothing is wasted. This is a particularly attractive solution for someone

already canning food, as vacuum sealing can be used to extend the shelf of food once the jars are opened.

Available in sizes up to 2 quarts, canning jars by Bell or Kerr offer enough flexibility so that just about any kind of food can be stored in them. They are particularly useful for soups, sauces and other liquids, which store much more easily in jars than in bags. For most foods they are also more convenient to serve from than sealed bags. And they are certainly easier to reseal after every use. Also vacuum sealed mason jars are completely vermin proof.

The only real downside with using jars is that they don't achieve the level of vacuum that one gets with sealer bags. What this means in practical terms is that for long term storage you are still better off using vacuum sealer bags rather than jars. Jars come into their own for perishables like fresh vegetables, or foods that you tend to use of the course of a week or so. Also once something is brought out of long term storage, for example from a freezer, and is being actively consumed, transferring the contents to jars will extend its refrigerator shelf life, while allowing repeated vacuum sealing in a convenient way.

The jar sealing accessories themselves are simple to use and inexpensive. They come in two sizes for regular and wide mouth jars. Consumer reviews seem to indicate that the wide mouth version is significantly more effective. Given the range of jars sizes for 3 inch wide, wide mouth jars, it is the most useful of the two standard sizes anyway.

#### Conclusion

Hopefully this article has convinced you that vacuum sealers are green kitchen appliances, extending the usable shelf life of foods and flavors will save you money and help you eat more healthily in a greener more environmentally friendly way.

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