



Unacceptable Food Storage Containers

Food products must be stored in food-grade containers at all times. Trash bags and empty chemical containers are not acceptable for food storage.

 ARTICLES | UPDATED: OCTOBER 26, 2018



Source: Bigstock

Imagine this: there is a large quantity of one product, like rolls, that must be stored. They cannot be left out on the cooling racks all night, but there is also no container large enough to store the whole batch. After a quick scan of the kitchen, the trash bags left out on the counter seem like the perfect place to put all of those rolls. The clear bags easily fit everything

without squishing the fluffy orbs, but is it actually safe to store them in bags that were designed with containing garbage in mind?

The quick answer to this question is NO! Food products must be stored in food-grade containers at all times. Food-grade is a term used by regulatory bodies in the United States and Europe. It is used to denote materials that are suitable to come in contact with food at any point during the harvesting, processing, or packaging of a product. It does not mean that something is edible, rather is approved to come in contact with food.

For a material to be certified as food-grade, it must go through extensive testing by a regulatory agency, like the USDA, before being approved. Testing focuses on how

the material reacts to the composition of the food as well as how it handles different storage conditions such as changing temperatures. The material is not allowed to affect the color, odor, or taste of the food in any capacity, so if any changes in the product are found during testing, the material will automatically fail. Once initial testing on the material is completed, the manufacturer must be approved to ensure that they follow Good Manufacturing Practices and are in compliance with local regulations. This works to ensure that the material will be consistently produced to the correct standards.

When conventional trash bags are produced, they are not made with food in mind, so there are components that could potentially be harmful to humans. This is not a problem if they are used only for trash because it will not be consumed, but if food products are stored in these bags, there is a chance for contamination. Skip the trash bags and instead use things specifically designed for food such as zip-top bags and re-usable plastic food storage containers.

If zip-top bags do not come in large enough sizes, do not worry, there are large plastic bag options that meet FDA/USDA food handling guidelines. To explore your options, reach out to your local restaurant store, and they should be able to recommend the correct bag for your food storage needs!

While having the correct storage containers is a large part of safely storing your foods, here are some other tips for safe storage:

- Set a time aside for receiving deliveries so you can store items as soon as you accept them.
- Label all items that are not stored in their original container and could be easily mistaken for other products. (i.e. flour, sugar, cleaning chemicals)
- When storing foods in temperature-controlled units, always provide some way to measure the temperature. Thermometers in coolers should be placed in the warmest part of the unit (close to the door), while thermometers should be placed in the coldest places of hot holding equipment.
- Do not overcrowd freezers and refrigerators and leave shelving open so that there is sufficient air flow to keep the products chilled. Do not line shelves with plastic wrap or aluminum foil.
- Clean storage areas regularly, this will prevent any leaks or spills from contaminating other foods as well as reduce the risk that pests will be attracted to your facility.

- If you are storing raw meats and seafood together with ready-to-eat foods, store raw foods on shelves below the ready-to-eat products.

Contamination can occur at any step during the flow of food which is why knowing about safe storage practices is just as important as knowing how to safely cook or serve food. Not every container is safe for storing your food items, so look for items that are specifically designed for food storage. Never store food in containers that originally held cleaning chemicals or other non-food items.