

Standard Operating Procedures for reusable containers



For further information please see our Sustainability Ratings Charts and Decision Tree for single-use food containers.

Background

Food film is a widely used resource for hotel and restaurant kitchens as it **prevents spoilage as well as protecting it from bacteria**. Despite being technically recyclable, most film is actually not recycled as machinery at waste management facilities is not equipped to capture it, or it is contaminated with organic waste. It is therefore usually incinerated or landfilled, both of which have environmental impacts and can negatively impact human health. **There are processes that can avoid the use of plastic film whilst still ensuring the safe preservation of food during storage.**

Reusable containers serve several functions in kitchens and storage areas. To guarantee hygiene standards for reusable containers, strict procedures must be followed, ranging from the correct care of the containers to the establishment of an orderly system for their handling, storage, washing and, once they have fulfilled their function, waste management that guarantees their recycling.

Steps on how to use reusable containers for dry storage, refrigeration, freezing, thawing and packaging

Choice

- 1 Purchase food grade containers and lids.

- 2 Choose the container and lid with hermetic sealing capability.

- 3 Check the specifications and characteristics of the container, such as whether it can be subjected to high or low temperatures and its recyclability.

- 4 In the case of reusable plastic containers, choose materials that are free from bisphenol chemicals.

- 5 Choose container types that are compatible with reusable labels.

Organisation

- 6 Organise containers by separating cooked food at the top and raw food at the bottom.

- 7 Separate into containers differentiating the different types of products thus avoiding cross contamination.





Use

- 8 Do not deposit hot food in plastic containers.

- 9 Avoid leaving containers open, check the condition and quality of containers and lids periodically.

- 10 Use containers with air inlet to store fruits and vegetables.

- 11 For thawing: use stainless steel or rigid plastic containers with lids and grids at the base that allow separation between the food and the thawing liquid, thawing products should be placed on lower shelves.

- 12 Store in a dry place and prepare clean and dry containers and lids for reuse.

Washing, storage and waste management

- 13 Dishwasher or manual washing can guarantee hygiene. Wash containers and their lids according to manufacturer's specifications each time food is changed.

 - 14 If containers are suitable for dishwashers place container upside down to ensure proper washing. Use the appropriate cycle in the dishwasher and set temperature accordingly.

 - 15 If washed by hands use the soft part of the scouring pad if the container is made from plastic to prevent scratches.


 - 16 In order to prevent odours and colours from setting in plastic containers wash it after use with soap and water or soak it in water. To prevent odours mix half a litre of water with baking soda, let the container stand overnight and wash it.

 - 17 To ensure that they are free of bacteria, food debris and allergens. Ensure they are dry and hygienic by using paper.

 - 18 A lid should be replaced when it does not guarantee an airtight seal, as it will not perform a barrier function.

 - 19 The container and lids have fulfilled their function and should be removed if they have suffered breakage, burns or wear.

 - 20 Once the container and lid have fulfilled their useful life, make sure they are separated to facilitate their recycling by a waste manager.

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IMPORTANT: ON THE MATERIAL



Containers can be made of metal, plastic or glass. Wooden or cardboard boxes or containers should be avoided as they are porous and accumulate microorganisms that can be transmitted to food.

Prioritise stainless steel or glass for its benefits

Stainless steel containers:

- Easy cleaning
- Many uses
- Does not retain bacteria because of its smooth surface
- A highly recyclable material and long durability
- It can be adapted to high and low temperatures
- It can be used for cooking or cooling food.

Glass containers:

- Protect the characteristics of food (glass does not trap odours or flavours or discolours)
- It is durable
- It can be easily washed in the dishwasher or by hand
- No possibility of contamination by plastics
- Its life through recycling is infinite.

There is a wide variety of food safe container lids on the market, some can be stretched to fit ensuring that containers are fully covered in the event that food needs to be completely isolated.

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