

# CONTAIN YOURSELF

SmarterHomeCooking's

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO  
MEAL PREP CONTAINERS



When it comes to meal prep, the food you cook is only half the equation. The containers you choose are just as important. The right vessel preserves freshness, locks in flavor, and makes your meals easy to transport and reheat.

A sturdy, well-sealed container can mean the difference between crisp vegetables and soggy ones, or between a fridge that feels organized and one that's overflowing with mismatched lids.

Beyond freshness, containers directly affect your efficiency and convenience.

We're here to help you pick the best option for your needs.

# Plastic Containers



**BEST FOR:**  
**Families**  
**bulk preppers**  
**budget-**  
**conscious**

# Pros

- Lightweight and affordable, making them easy to stock up on in bulk.
- Come in a wide range of sizes, shapes, and stackable designs, including deli-style containers.
- Many are microwave-safe (check label), and some are freezer-friendly.





# Cons

- Can stain (tomato sauces, curries) and absorb odors.
- Over time, lids may warp or crack.
- Some plastics can leach chemicals if reheated too often (look for BPA-free or safer plastics).
- Not always dishwasher safe.

# Takeaways

These inexpensive containers can be easily found at grocery stores and retailers selling home goods. While we recognize that they are not eco-friendly, having a few on hand is a good strategy.

They are great for transporting meals because they are lightweight. Plus, the price means that if you lose them or leave at a gathering, it's not a big deal. Our philosophy is that if a container leaves our house, we don't expect you to return it.

Because plastic containers are compact and stackable, they work well in a small kitchen where space is tight. That said, unless you're vigilant, you may end up with a cabinet or drawer filled with random lids.

They are not good for long-term freezing. Use them for short-term storage. Maybe opt for deli-style containers (there's a reason professional kitchens rely on them). Additionally, all the lids are the same size, so losing one or two isn't a big deal.

# Glass Containers



**BEST FOR:**  
Health-conscious  
cooks,  
frequent  
reheating

# Pros

- Non-porous: won't stain or absorb odors.
- Can go from freezer → oven/microwave → dishwasher safely.
- Durable over the long term (less replacement needed).





# Cons

- Heavy and less portable.
- Can break or chip if dropped.
- Take up more cabinet space compared to collapsible options.

# Our Take

We love these for reheating, whether it's in the microwave or oven. Food tastes much fresher than reheating in plastic.

They are ideal for batch-cooked meals stored in the fridge, but they do take up a lot of room. Make sure you buy a set that is stackable. Otherwise, you need a lot of cabinet storage space.

Our issue is that sizes are somewhat limited. We always find that they are too big or way too small. However, we do love that some are available in multi-compartment versions.

# **Bamboo (biodegradable) Containers**



# Pros

- Eco-friendly and compostable.
- Lightweight and attractive—great for serving as well as storing.
- Often toxin-free and marketed as a healthier alternative to plastic.



# Cons

- Not always microwave- or dishwasher-safe.
- Limited durability. They tend to warp or break down with repeated use.
- Not airtight, so not ideal for long-term storage or liquid-heavy meals.

# Our Take

In theory, these are a good option that makes us feel like we are doing good for the planet. In practice, they are not as versatile (not for freezing) and don't last as long as other options.

They are best for dry snacks, fresh produce, or short-term meal prep.



# Stainless Steel or Aluminum Containers



# Pros

- Excellent for freezer-to-oven convenience.
- Great for big-batch meal prep or casseroles.
- Disposable or reusable a few times.
- Lightweight and inexpensive in bulk.



# Cons

- Not microwave safe.
- Aluminum can bend or puncture easily.
- Some not airtight. Food can dry out if stored too long.



# Our Take

Again, having a few of these on hand is practical. But the aluminum ones are best suited for bigger meal prep (think holidays and special occasion gatherings)

They are ideal for prepping meals you'll bake or reheat in the oven within a short time of making those meals. Also, great for transporting and gifting meals to others.

The stainless steel containers have that eco-friendly appeal and durability, but can't be microwaved. While they are easy to transport and clean, if you're headed to an office, where reheating is limited to a microwave, think twice.

# Bento Boxes



**BEST FOR:**  
Portion control,  
kids' lunches,  
office meals,  
variety lovers

# Pros

- Divided compartments keep foods separate (no soggy mixing).
- Encourages portion control and balanced meals.
- Many styles: plastic, stainless steel, silicone insert dividers.
- Kid- and adult-friendly designs.



# Cons

- Not ideal for bulk storage (designed for daily portions).
- Can be tricky to clean if lots of tiny compartments.
- Some styles may not be leakproof.



# Our Take

We love the concept of food items divided into individual portions. With each food item sitting in its own compartment, you can mix wet items and dry goods without worrying that everything will become a soggy mess.

If you've got kids, you need at least one of these for lunches, school, and travel. Excellent for lunch, work, school, and travel.

# Snackle Boxes



**BEST FOR:**  
Road trips,  
picnics, grazing  
boards, healthy  
snackers, families  
with kids

# Pros

- Perfect for organizing snacks (nuts, fruit, cheese, crackers).
- Keeps items neat and separated, reducing sogginess.
- Great for road trips, picnics, office grazing, or kids' after-school snacks.
- Often repurposed from tackle boxes or bead organizers, making them customizable.



# Cons

- Not designed for hot meals or reheating.
- Can be bulky depending on size.
- Not always airtight, so fresh items may dry out.

# Our Take

These are just plain fun because they hold so many different items. It's a creative way to encourage healthy snacking and portioning.

They can also be excellent for entertaining—prepped ahead and pulled out for grazing.



# Silicone Bags



**BEST FOR:**  
Eco-conscious  
cooks, freezer  
storage, marinating  
flexible portions

# Pros

- Freezer-safe and flexible. They can easily fit odd-shaped items for maximize freezer space.
- Reusable, eco-friendly alternative to single-use plastic bags.
- Many are dishwasher- and microwave-safe.
- Airtight seal prevents leaks and freezer burn.



# Cons

- Higher upfront cost compared to disposable bags.
- Can stain with sauces (like tomato) or retain odors if not cleaned well.
- Takes longer to dry after washing.

# Our Take

We adore the fun design options. And while they do come in a range of sizes (snack to gallon), they're often hard to fill and clean.

We love them for the kiddos' snacks and lunches. They are also great for marinating meats, freezing fruits/veggies, or portioning soups and sauces.



# Mason Jars



# Pros

- Durable, reusable, and can last for years.
- Excellent for portioning and displaying layered meals (salads, overnight oats, parfaits).
- Freezer-safe if you leave headspace and use wide-mouth jars.
- Non-toxic: no staining, odors, or leaching.



# Cons

- Heavy and breakable if dropped.
- Not as portable (can be bulky for on-the-go lunches).
- Canning lids may rust or lose an airtight seal over time.

# Our Take

Remember the everything-in-a-mason-jar rage? We do, and we were way into it. Unfortunately, we overdid it and quickly found out they are bulky to store and appropriate for all our needs.

Still, we love mason jars for salad dressings as well as preparing salads (wet/dry separation - with dressing on the bottom and greens on top). They are also ideal for prepping soups and smoothies.



# Plastic Freezer Bags



# Pros

- Inexpensive and easy to find.
- Space-saving, as they can lie flat in the freezer, which is ideal for stacking.
- Great for large-batch meal prep, freezer meals, or separating proteins.
- Can be labeled and tossed after use (no washing required).



# Cons

- Single-use plastic is wasteful and not eco-friendly.
- Can puncture or leak, especially with sharp foods or overfilling.
- Not ideal for reheating (must transfer to another container).



# Takeaways

Much like their reusable cousins, plastic freezer storage bags are perfect for freezing flat when freezer storage space is tight. It's easy to portion soups, stews, or casseroles into flat "bricks" for fast thawing.

However, they are not eco-friendly, and the guilt alone from contributing to the landfill, has us using them only sparingly.

# Additional Considerations

Thinking about both the volume of food you typically prep and the storage space you have available (in your fridge, freezer, and kitchen cabinets) will help you choose a set of containers that keeps your kitchen organized and your meals fresh.

# Size Matters

- **Shallow, rectangular containers** are excellent for fridge stacking since they sit flush and maximize shelf space.
- **Tall, cylindrical containers** like mason jars are better for vertical storage in tight spaces.
- **Larger containers** are ideal for family-style portions or bulk-prepped foods such as casseroles and soups, but they may take up valuable real estate in the fridge or freezer.
- **Smaller containers** are perfect for single-serve meals or snacks, though they can quickly multiply.



# Shape is a Big Factor

- **Wide, flat containers** keep layered meals or roasted vegetables from getting squished.
- **Divided containers or bento boxes** help separate food types and control portions.
- **Uniform shapes**, such as a consistent set of **square or rectangular containers**, are usually easier to stack and organize than a mix of odd-shaped bowls or novelty containers.





By investing in the right mix of vessels, you not only extend the life of your meals but also make meal prep more enjoyable, sustainable, and stress-free. The right container system doesn't just hold your food, it supports your lifestyle.

If you need help picking a meal prep method that best fits your lifestyle, you can also check our [Meal Prep Guide](#).