

Dog Food Storage, Dog Bowl Selection, and Cleaning Your Dog Bowls.

Dry Dog Food Storage:

Dry dog food and open air are enemies. "What?", you say... Well, you may have noticed some of the super premium dog food manufacturers have started packaging their products in an airtight Mylar or other type of poly-bag with a slick finish. These are airtight bags, and some manufactures even use vacuum-sealed poly-bags to remove the air (e.g., [Solid Gold brand pet foods](#)). Some have even gone to the trouble of adding a re-sealable zip-lock on the bag so that you can keep the kibbles unexposed to the open air after opening the bag (e.g., [Precise Holistic brand pet foods](#)). We started looking in to this to determine why manufacturers are moving away from the heavy paper bags and discovered some interesting information. There is a process called "oxidation" that starts occurring as soon as you open your fresh bag of dog food. Manufacturers add food preservatives to the dog food, but some preservatives are unhealthy for dogs so, natural preservatives are starting to be used. Natural preservatives such as tocopherols (vitamin E), ascorbates and palmitates (vitamin C) are healthier and reasonably effective but do not provide as long of shelf life of the food (see our discussion on dog food preservatives at our [website - click here](#)). Poly-bags are airtight and keep oxidation to a minimum. Some poly-bags are even vacuum-sealed. If your dog food comes in a heavy paper bag (as many still do), it is not airtight and certainly not vacuum-sealed. Air can get in those kind of bags from the moment it is bagged at the factory and all the while it sits at the distribution center and on the shelf of the pet store. Oxidation of the dry kibble bits accelerates spoilage, promotes bacterial and viral growth, and causes loss in the nutritional values. All of these effects can have immediate effects on your dog, or may not show up until several years down the road, but in either case, you probably won't know what is making your dog is sick.

Some of you might be thinking, "I'm not really worried about it." But we hear so many stories from dog owners who share that their previous dog had to be put down due to various illnesses ranging from heart disease, cancer, premature chronic arthritic conditions, and the list goes on. Many of these ailments are inevitable when your dog is late into its elderly years, but there are a number of these illnesses reported when dogs are only half way through their estimated life span and suffer from these type of ailments. We cannot help but think, "What if the food that was given were better quality, fresher, less oxidized? Could this help ensure a better quality of life for our canine friends as the years go by?" We think so.

We recommend a couple of things to help combat the inevitable effect of dog food oxidation: The first thing you can do is buy your dog food weekly in smaller amounts rather than stocking up with a 35 or 40 pound bag which is intended to last you for the whole month or more. But not only is this inconvenient, it is also more costly, and just plainly unacceptable for some. Therefore, we have some other ideas that can help: One thing you can do if you have a large amount of freezer space available, after buying a 35 to 40 pound bag of dog food, you can buy the 1 gallon sized zip-lock freezer bags and individually bag the kibbles in smaller quantities and freeze them. This will not only keep your dog food fresher, but if you have a small dog or a fussy eater that does not eat a whole lot, it will allow that large bag to last you several months with far less chance of going bad. A 35-pound bag of dog food will require about 10 to 14 gallon sized freezer bags. You just thaw out a freezer bag as needed.

Another thing you can do is choose one of the more expensive dog foods that come in a very nice re-sealable zip-lock poly-bag. This is probably the best recommendation. If this is outside your budget, buy one bag of the expensive brand just a couple of times a year and re-use the zip-lock bag for other dog food. Even if you don't

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stick with the expensive dog food for the long term due to cost, you can still transfer a cheaper dog food into that same bag once you have used all of it. We have done this and it works very nicely in our 4 to 5 month rotation of dog foods. The only drawback is that you do not want to use the same poly-bag for more than about 4 to 5 months. There are two very good reasons for this: First, the oils from the dry kibbles will begin to coat the inside of the poly-bag and will eventually become rancid. Therefore, it's not a bad idea to wash out the bag with warm garden-hose water (in the summer) or warm shower-head water (in the winter), and then thoroughly dry the bag out with paper towels before pouring in the new batch. The second reason is the zip-lock mechanism will eventually begin to wear out and lose its ability to seal effectively. So, just replace the bag every so often.

Some people buy airtight, plastic containers with screw-on or snap-on lids for their dog food but we do not necessarily think these are the best idea for several reasons: First, the oils in the kibble bits will leach into the porous plastic and will eventually turn rancid and contaminate new food when added. Second, it's usually very common to just pour in the new food on top of the old, not realizing that after a while the kibbles at the bottom of the food container become very old and well past their expiration date. Third, washing these out is only partially effective unless you use very hot, soapy water and then thoroughly dry. As the containers are used beyond the first 6 months, thorough washing has to be done every couple of months, and most people tend to forget. If you don't do this, the plastic containers will become a breeding ground for bacterial and viral growth.

So as a minimum, here is a list of Do's and Don'ts that you want to keep in mind when storing your dry dog food:

Do NOT:

- Do not leave the bag open and exposed to air after opening the bag.
- Do not store the food in the sunlight.
- Do not let the food get wet; if it does get wet, throw it away.
- Do not keep the food past the expiration date even if you do not open the bag.
- Do not throw the bag away if you are transferring the kibbles to another container. Even if you store it in an airtight container, you should keep the batch code from the original package labeling until you have finished the food. This allows you to protect your pet in the event of a recall.
- Do not pour in the new food on top of old food before it is COMPLETELY gone unless you pour out the old food and put it ON TOP OF the new food.
- Do not accidentally let your pet get into the storage bin and go on an eating binge. This is especially true with the higher quality pet foods that are designed with high calories packed into every cup. A 50 lb dog that gets into a food storage bin and freely gorges him/herself can literally eat as much as 10,000 calories in one binge. That can lead to bloat (which can kill your pet if not noticed within 30-45 minutes and may require a very expensive trip to the vet if you catch it in time). This can also result in obesity, diarrhea, constipation, and other health problems. Make sure your bin has a secure top to keep your dog out, as well as other animals, insects and mice. Also make sure it is stored in a secure location such as on a shelf or in a room with a door that closes on it's own (especially in homes with young children).

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DO:

- Completely finish the food within 30 to 45 days of opening the bag.
- Throw away what you don't use after 30 to 45 days. Just because the expiration date says the food is still good, keep in mind that date applies to an unopened bag.
- Keep the portion of the bag which shows the barcode, expiration date and batch code. This allows you to protect your pet in the event of a pet food recall, and allows you to report product quality problems to the manufacturer if discovered days or weeks later.
- Store the food in an airtight container (preferably still in the original bag inside the airtight container)
- Store the food in a cool and dry place.
- Rinse the container every other use (two months max; oils that have leached into your container's porous surfaces eventually go rancid and contaminate new food).
- If the bag of food you purchase will not completely fit into your container, then line the food bin with an airtight bag. Pour in what will fit and keep the rest either in its original bag, tightly sealed in a cool, dry place until it will fit in the bin. Or (better yet), put the remainder of the food in zip-lock bags and store them in your freezer; remove them as needed (making sure to cut the barcode, batch code and expiration date off the original bag and tape it onto a storage bag). Or, purchase smaller bags of dog food (you may spend more per pound but you spend less at the vet because the health effects of eating rancid food can be costly to diagnose and treat).

Wet Dog Food Storage:

Sometimes, wet or canned dog food is a good alternative for a small puppy who is having a hard time eating dry kibbles because its digestive track is not mature enough to handle the dry kibbles yet. You can moisten the dry kibbles and this seems to help. One advantage of canned dog food is that it has a much longer shelf life compared to dry kibbles, as long as you don't open the can. When you do open it, all bets are off, and since it is wet, it must be refrigerated. However, canned dog food is more expensive and it can be difficult to get your dog to learn to like dry kibbles if they have gotten thoroughly use to canned dog food. Canned dog food is a whole different game when it comes time to store it. Your best bet is to buy the size of can that your dog can consume in one feeding; it is not good to leave wet food out in the bowl all day long. If it is not possible to buy a can size that can be consumed in one feeding, refrigerate the remaining food in a refrigerator-safe container with a removable lid on it. The amount of time it takes wet dog food to spoil when left out depends on several factors such as temperature, humidity, the last time you cleaned the dog bowl, and whether the food it is left indoors or outdoors where it is exposed to sunlight. To be safe, refrigerate any wet dog food that is uneaten within one to two hours after opening the can. Throw out all food that has been in the refrigerator for more than 3 days, and always remember to visually inspect the food and check for any unusual odor before giving it to your pet.

Dog Bowl Selection:

Now here is an interesting subject that is often given little or no thought. The material used in dog bowls could have serious consequences on your pet's health if you do not properly clean or handle the bowl. Common

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materials used for both food and water bowls are as follows (we have added our positive and negative comments for you to consider):

Material:	Pros:	Cons:
Plastic – poor	Inexpensive; top rack dishwasher safe;	Porous material collects bacterial and viral growth; can be chewed up by your dog; becomes stained; laborious to properly clean.
Glass – better	Dishwasher safe; non-porous; very easy to properly clean; medium priced.	If not handled properly, can break and cause serious injury to both pets and humans.
Glazed Ceramic/Stoneware – better	Most are dishwasher safe; almost non-porous; fairly easy to properly clean; medium to higher priced.	Breakable; has to be cleaned like a porous material if it becomes chipped and scratched; can be fairly expensive.
Stainless Steel – best	Dishwasher safe; non-porous; non-breakable; easy to properly clean; medium to higher priced.	Can be higher priced for heavy weight versions; lighter weight versions can be pushed around unless the bowl has a rubber non-skid bottom, or has a heavier base that the bowls sit in.

We like stainless-steel bowls and use them most. It is an all around good material, very durable, and lasts for years if you get the ones that are heavier. Some have a rubber non-skid coating on the bottom which is nice, provided your dog doesn't chew up the rubbery part. Otherwise, these will last for years and are virtually indestructible. They are very shiny when you first get them, and will become scratched (kind of like your everyday silverware in the kitchen drawer). The scratching is ok and does not affect the usability, unless you begin to see tarnishing on the stainless surface. This normally does not occur on stainless-steel, but the bowl should be replaced if that occurs.

Cleaning the Dog Bowls:

Over time, a dog bowl can become very unhealthy for your dog if not cleaned on a regular basis. For some it is not uncommon to keep filling the bowls with food and water for days or even weeks at a time before cleaning the bowl. For others, a quick rinse in the sink is all that is done before the next feeding. We are not here to disparage or insult anyone, and we certainly don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but we do hope to educate everyone so that they can start taking steps today that we think will add years of quality living to their dog's life. So how often should a dog bowl be cleaned and how should it be cleaned? The answer depends on the material your dog bowl is made of. The way to go about cleaning non-porous materials like glass or stainless-steel is somewhat different than cleaning a porous bowl material like plastic. For example, with a glass or stainless-steel bowl, warm soapy water and a sponge or dish rag is adequate to clean the bowls once a day.

Some people use large plastic cool whip or margarine containers, which is ok if you throw the container away about once a week. Otherwise, for plastics or other synthetic materials that are porous, it is essential to use very hot water with soap on a daily basis. In fact, if your dishwasher has a "sanitize" mode (a mode where the

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dishwasher heats up the water to 150-160 degrees), you may want to use this with your porous dog bowl placed on the top rack of the dishwasher. If you use the bottom rack, a plastic bowl will melt because the heating element is under the bottom rack. In addition and about every other day, porous bowls should be cleaned with a water and liquid bleach mixture (16 parts water to 1 part bleach) by letting the mixture sit on the plastic surfaces of the bowl for several minutes, and then thoroughly rinsed and dried. The reason for this extra step of bleaching is that the porous materials are a breeding ground for food decay and bacteria. Over time, the little micro-pockets in the porous material will develop into a toxic culture of bacterial and viral infection that can make your dog very sick; if your dog becomes ill, you may not even have a clue as to what is causing the sickness.

With ceramic bowls and stoneware, they eventually develop small chips and scratches in the surface as they are banged around. Once the glossy, glazed finish is broken and the porous base material is exposed, you then have a material that is vulnerable to bacterial and viral growth. So, it is good to use the same bleaching process every other day on ceramic and stoneware bowls that are several months old.

As we research these subjects, it's always good to take a step back and ask, "Am I being a bit over-cautious with all these details on dog care?" We have had to ask ourselves that question many times. We love dogs very, very much and we probably go to great extremes compared to most, but we are certainly not in that group that elevates animals above the status of humans. Therefore, we believe to the degree in which we care for our children, our grand children, and even people we may not know, our dogs should come second. With that being said, it is written, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal". We try to provide healthy care. We hope this material is helpful to you, and as we always like to remind our readers that we are not experts on any subject. We encourage everyone to do their own homework so that they can make informed decisions about pet care.

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