**Household Items People Repurposed During the Great Depression**

*by* [**Matt**](https://www.askaprepper.com/author/matt/)

During the Great Depression, when times were unimaginably tough, people relied heavily on repurposing household items to survive.

Prepping today draws upon this resourcefulness, as the ability to creatively reuse what you already have can be invaluable during any crisis or SHTF situation.

In this article we want to dive deep into some specific items repurposed during the Depression era and how modern preppers can apply these ideas.

**Clothing and Fabric**

Clothing wasn’t just something you wore—it was a versatile resource. Clothes were repeatedly mended until they could no longer be repaired. Once garments were beyond use, they were transformed into quilts, rags, or even clothing for children.

Flour sacks, for example, were a lifeline for many families. Manufacturers began to print pretty patterns on them as people increasingly used the sacks to sew dresses, aprons, and curtains.

In today’s context, being able to sew and patch up clothing is a survival skill worth learning. Instead of throwing away torn clothes, preppers can [learn to repurpose](https://www.askaprepper.com/stop-throwing-away-spoiled-milk-do-this-instead/) fabric for practical uses—whether for insulation, bandages, or makeshift bags.

Fabric from old sheets or shirts can be cut into bandanas, scarves, or masks.

In the same vein, learning how to make quilts from worn-out clothing can provide warmth in colder weather climates.

**Old Tires**

In the 1930s, old tires were more valuable than one might think. People often repurposed car or bicycle tires to create durable shoe soles.

This was especially common in rural areas where sturdy footwear was needed for farm work and other manual labor. The tough rubber provided much-needed protection for feet at a time when buying new shoes was out of the question.

**Canning Jars and Food Storage**

Food storage was a crucial part of surviving the Great Depression, and canning jars played a central role.

People reused canning jars over and over again for storing not only food, but also household items like screws, nails, and even small tools. Tin cans were another resource often repurposed.

Once the food was gone, these cans became lanterns, scoops, or even children’s toys.

Modern preppers who practice [home canning](https://www.askaprepper.com/canning-mormon-beans-for-long-term-preservation/) can take inspiration from this. Empty canning jars can serve multiple purposes—like organizing seeds for gardening or even turning into makeshift drinking cups or vases.

Old jars can be reused for fermenting vegetables or as containers for storing dehydrated food long-term. Similarly, knowing how to use empty cans for simple DIY tools (such as a scooper for grains or small planting pots) can reduce waste​.

**Furniture and Wood Scraps**

When furniture became too worn out to use, it wasn’t thrown away—it was dismantled for firewood or to make small repairs around the house. Scrap wood was used for everything from patching up homes to building new structures, such as sheds, chicken coops, or storage boxes.

Today, as lumber prices rise, knowing how to salvage old wood is a valuable skill for any prepper to have. Wooden pallets or discarded furniture can be repurposed for raised garden beds, firewood, or emergency repairs to shelter.

Knowing how to safely break down larger wooden items and store scrap wood can help provide a ready supply of building materials in a crisis. But make sure to never burn or work with [**these types of wood**](https://hop.clickbank.net/?affiliate=lostways&vendor=wfguide&tid=A02MariaHouseholdRepurposeLinkFG)that are common, but poisonous.

**Animal Bones and Hides**

During the Great Depression, bones were boiled to make broth, which served as a nutritious base for many meals.

Once the broth was made, the bones were often dried and ground up to make bone meal, which was used as a fertilizer.

Animal hides were used to make clothing, blankets, or even rugs.

In a long-term survival situation, these practices can be essential. Knowing how to utilize every part of an animal, including the bones and hides, is a skill preppers should familiarize themselves with. Not only does this minimize waste, but it also provides additional food sources and materials for making tools, clothing, and insulation​.

**Glass Bottles and Jugs**

Glass bottles and jugs were valuable commodities. Rather than being tossed, they were washed out and used to store liquids, like water, milk, or homemade vinegar. Large jugs became flower vases, and smaller ones were sometimes turned into oil lamps with the addition of a wick.

Glass containers are still a staple in many prepping kits today. They can be used to store clean drinking water, make homemade cleaning solutions, or ferment food like pickles and sauerkraut. Knowing how to safely repurpose glass bottles for multiple uses can help preppers cut down on waste and make the most out of limited resources​.

**Tin Foil and Metal Containers**

Even the smallest scraps of metal were repurposed. Tin foil was reused over and over again flattened out and saved for later use in cooking or wrapping food.

Metal containers, such as old coffee cans or biscuit tins, were turned into toolboxes, storage containers, or even small stoves for heating food.

For preppers, metal containers are particularly useful because they can be used to store items securely, protect perishables from pests, or even shield electronics from EMPs.

While tin foil can help in basic EMP protection, it may not give you the full security you need. To truly safeguard your vital electronics, [**the EMP Cloth**](https://hop.clickbank.net/?affiliate=lostways&vendor=empcloth&tid=A02MariaHouseholdRepurposeEMPC) offers far superior, military-grade protection.

It’s specifically designed to block electromagnetic waves and ensure your devices are safe from EMPs. Since it’s difficult to produce and rarely stays in stock, now is the perfect time to[**get yours while you can**](https://hop.clickbank.net/?affiliate=lostways&vendor=empcloth&tid=A02MariaHouseholdRepurposeEMPC). Don’t wait until it’s too late to fully secure your equipment and prep for the worst.

Repurposing metal scraps, just as Depression-era families did, is a critical skill when living off-grid or in a long-term survival situation.

**Newspapers and Magazines**

Paper products were far too valuable to waste. Newspapers were often repurposed as insulation to keep homes warm during cold winters. They were also used to line drawers, wrap food, and even as toilet paper when supplies ran out.

Magazines, once read, became makeshift wrapping paper, and padding, or were used for crafts such as papier-mache, or as you may know it paper mache.

Preppers can apply these same concepts by saving newspapers and magazines for similar uses.

In addition to insulating windows or walls, paper can be shredded for kindling.

During an emergency, when modern conveniences are unavailable, having a stack of old newspapers or magazines could be invaluable for everyday tasks like starting fires, packing food, or creating makeshift insulation.

**Lessons From the Great Depression for Preppers Today**

The Great Depression showed us that with creativity, almost anything can be repurposed.

Learning these skills now can help preppers not only survive but thrive in a crisis.

By seeing the potential in household items most people would throw away, you’re one step closer to self-reliance.

In today’s world, where resources could quickly become scarce, the ability to repurpose what you have on hand is invaluable.