

SURVIVAL PAPER

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Survival Supplies On A Budget by Paul G. Arnswald

OK, so you've decided you want to start acquiring some supplies for whatever contingency you're anticipating. Maybe it's a basic kit, a "bug-out" bag (otherwise known as a G.O.O.D. or "Get Out Of Dodge" bag), a first aid kit, or a fully stocked fallout shelter, whatever. But, lets say your funds are somewhat limited. Where do you go and where do you start ? Following is a list of "tips" to help you get started. By no means will this be the end-all solution to all your needs. I'm sure many readers will agree and disagree with some of my suggestions. I'm simply trying to pass on a few pointers (and please forgive me if I "ramble-on" when it comes to personal experiences).

Those of us who've been involved in the survival/self-reliance lifestyle for quite some time didn't all rush out and buy everything at once. Usually, we pick up an item or two here or there as we saw a particular need arise. Or when we found a good bargain that we just couldn't pass up. So let's get started.

"Dollar Stores": These places have absolutely flourished in the past few years. You can practically find one in every strip mall you see. And yes, a lot of the stuff you'll find here is junk "made in China", but you'd be surprised at some of the items you'll find there now days. First aid supplies like isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide (these both are normally 2 for \$1), gauze pads, antibiotic ointment, acetaminophen (generic Tylenol), ibuprophen, aspirin, sunscreen, anti-histamine tablets. Usually they are small containers perfect for fitting in small first aid kits. I recently purchased a couple tubes of extra-strength oral analgesic gel (benzocaine 20%). I even found one that carried hemorrhoid ointment and anti-diarreal tablets (loperamide hydrochloride). Needless to say, I bought all that they had left on the shelf. These usually sell out pretty fast. The only first aid item I DO NOT recommend from these dollar stores are the adhesive bandages. I've tried several different brands from several different stores and they all seem to fall short when it comes to the "adhesive" part. However, if you do find a brand of these that do hold up, please let me know. I go through a lot of of bandages. Aside from first aid supplies, you can usually find other useful items such as hygiene products, kitchen supplies, storage containers of various sizes, towels/washcloths, disposable butane lighters (usually a 4 or 5 pack and usually with the desirable childproof feature that prevents the butane from escaping when they're packed into your kits), foodstuffs (canned goods, "Slim-Jims", pastas, etc...). But, remember, these stores are practically everywhere and they all seem to carry similar items. Some will be worth a dollar, some will not. Shop around. That's something I'll be mentioning quite a bit.

“Discount, Sporting Goods & Drug Stores”: Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Sam’s Club, Target, Sports Authority, Walgreens, CVS, etc... Watch the sale papers *carefully*. Sometimes a misprint can work out to your advantage if you’re persistent enough. Just last week Target was advertising “2 Packs” of 2 AA Mini-Mag Flashlights for \$6.79 (normally \$8.84), well that sounded too good to be true, so, I decided to take a trip to Target. Sure enough, it was a misprint. It was actually a single 2AA Mini-Mag that was on sale. Well, I politely asked the supervisor if she would be willing to honor the add by just giving me two of the single 2 AA Mini-Mags for the price of just the one, she declined. “That’s fine”, I said, “but, could I possibly get the address of the main office, because I really feel that’s false advertising and I’d like to write them a letter stating so”. The supervisor then said, “You know what, let me go talk to my manager and see what I can do”. Next thing you know, I was walking out of Target with Two 2AA Mini-Mags for the price of one. After politely thanking the manager and the supervisor of course (remember you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar). Be polite, but, be persistent. I’m sure that right after I left the store they pulled the circular out of the display case you see when you walk in the door and placed a sign stating that it was a misprint, but, hey it worked. (**on a personal note: I know that a lot of people will say that there are a lot better quality flashlights out there than Mag-Lites, but, I swear by them. In fact, I still have a 3 D cell Mag-Lite that I bought at the BX (Base Exchange) while I was a Security Policeman in the Air Force to replace those plastic angle-head flashlights we were issued. That Mag-Lite cost me about \$3 back then, is almost twenty years old and I’ve only had to replace the bulb once. And guess where I got the replacement bulb ? Wal-Mart. I also have several of the 2AA Mini-Maglights and have given them for gifts to many people over the years and they’re ALL still working**)

These stores, especially Wal-Mart, sell a lot of camping gear that is well suited for survival kits. And generally if you mention that you saw the same item at K-mart or somewhere else for a lower price, they’ll not only match it, they’ll usually beat it (and in this instance they’ll usually thank you for bringing it to their attention, they not only want your business, they want everyone’s business. A lot of people shop around). These stores also used to be a great place to get a great price on firearms and ammunition. Well, in the case of Wal-Mart, you need to travel way out of the Chicagoland area to find one that still sells these items. There is one in Morris, Illinois, right off of Interstate 80, that has quite a selection of rifles and shotguns. I stopped there last summer while camping along the Illinois River. I ended up buying a couple cases of shotgun shells because of the sale they were having. But, all of my local Wal-Marts have succumbed to the pressure of his royal highness (Mayor Daley) and no longer offer these items. As far as K-mart goes, well I guess we have people like Rosie O’Donell and Michael Moore to thank for the absence of all firearms and everything except .22 Long Rifle and only a few boxes of shotgun shells on the shelves of the local K-mart (again, I am writing this in regards to the stores in the Chicago metro area).

I recently went around to do some price checking on items ranging from water filters (Katadyn, PUR & a brand I’ve never heard of, Sawyer), compasses, Mountain House freeze dried rations, ammunition and .12 gauge flares. Some of the things I found out were: Sports Authority, despite showing a 50% savings on Winchester 9mm ammo in their recent sales flyer (\$4.99 instead of the regular price of \$9.99), had no ammunition of any caliber. When I inquired about this to one of the sales associates, I was told that none of the Sports Authority stores in Illinois sell ammunition. However, I will commend them on the variety of the other items I was checking on. The staff also

seemed to be very knowledgeable (as well as polite) about the items they were selling, Their prices also seemed very reasonable compared to the other sporting good stores I visited (Sportmart and Galyan's). Again, on a personal note, I miss the "old" Sportmart. I personally purchased a couple firearms (including a Remington 7400 30.06 and a Winchester 1400 .12 gauge, both at almost "dealer" cost) as well as dozens of boxes of shotgun shells and both rifle and pistol ammunition. Oh well, times change. Sportmart no longer sells any firearms or ammunition. I guess they're more concerned with selling over-priced athletic shoes and replica jerseys of national sports teams. Too bad, I have many fond memories of "camping-out" on the sidewalk of the Sportmart on 95th Street & Cicero avenue in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Back in the 70's & early 80's, this was the closest store that had a Ticketmaster. When tickets for a big concert would be going on sale, there would be a long line that would usually form the night before out in front. People would bring sleeping bags, lawn chairs, portable TV's and sometimes even their kids to wait in line. They did away with the Ticketmaster too. I'm proud to say, I will never shop at Sportmart again. There seems to be no reason to (sorry if I seem bitter).

Menards : OK, I'll admit it, I think I'm addicted to Menards. It seems I'm there at least once a week. A year or so ago they started advertising in their sales fliers several items that were "free". But, there is a catch. After you pay for the "free" item, you need to send in a rebate certificate and the rebate receipt that's attached to your receipt. They then send you a merchandise credit check good for a future purchase in the amount of the "free" item you previously purchased. Usually there is a limit on how many of the items may be redeemed for these checks per address or household. Well, if it's a good enough deal, usually what I do is have the first one sent to my address, another to my Mother's house, another to my Grandparents, etc...I've since lost count on how many of these merchandise credit checks I've received. At one point a couple months ago, I had over \$100 accumulated. Some of the items include tools, scented candles, tool boxes, batteries, thermal socks, all sorts of leather work gloves, light bulbs, various types of caulks and glues, pocket knives, tarps, photo albums, BBQ sauce and the list goes on. They also offer this program where the rebate is a small percentage of the cost of the actual product. For an example, in a recent flier, you could receive \$5 back from the purchase of a \$19.95 power tool. Basically, it's a marketing tool in order to get you to return to the store in the future. I don't think I've spent any actual cash at a Menards in over six months now, because, it seems every couple of weeks I get more credit checks in the mail. So, I guess the marketing plan is working. But, I usually only get the items that I know I'll be getting a rebate check for. Another hint when mailing in the rebate certificates and receipts. When I first started doing this over a year ago, I would send each in a separate envelope. But, then I tried sending 4 or 5 in the same envelope since they all go to the same P.O. Box in Elk Mound, Wisconsin. And it seems to be working fine. As long as all the rebates you're requesting will be sent to the same address/household that is. If you will be "doubling up" your purchases, just make sure that you send them in separate envelopes for the separate addresses/households. You get the picture.

The next source for acquiring items will probably be upsetting to some, but, will be beneficial to others. It's a source I will simply refer to as :

"Smokers Revenge" : I'm happy to announce that as of this writing, I have been "smoke-free" for almost two months now. This was no easy task (as anyone who's ever tried to quit will attest to) because, I was a smoker for over 20 years. At the time I finally quit, I was up to almost two packs a day. With cigarette taxes raised once again in Cook

County, Illinois a few months ago, it got to the point where they ranged from \$4 to over \$5 a pack. Even with my weekend trips across the border into Indiana (where taxes are much less), I was still spending hundreds of dollars a month to basically shorten my life span. I still have the “urge” every now and then (and I know I will for sometime), but, so far so good.

However, while I was a smoker, my poison of choice was always Marlboros. Many of you are aware that Marlboro for the past ten plus years has had their “Miles” program. Basically, you save the UPC codes from the side of the pack and each UPC was worth 5 miles. Every year or so a catalog of “Marlboro Gear” would come out. When you saved up enough “Miles”, you could redeem them for a wide range of “Marlboro Gear” (most of the items in the catalog seemed to be geared toward outdoor, “western” themes) and boy did I take advantage of this program. Plus, not all the “Miles” were smoked by me. On several occasions, handfulls (and sometimes bags filled) were given to me by friends or co-workers who “didn’t want to bother” with saving them and sending them in. At one point, I actually put a 5lb coffee can on the counter at an auto parts shop where I was working and it would be filled sometimes by complete strangers. I also admit that every once in a while (OK, I did it all the time) I would simply pick up packs off of the ground and strip off the “Miles” (then throw the empty pack in the garbage, I figure if I can pick up litter for my own benefit, the worse possible thing I could do would be to litter again, that, to me is just plain wrong). Following is a list of only “some” of the items I got from Marlboro : 3 leather wallets, 3 sleeping bags, 2 tents, a Garmin Etrex GPS (Global Positioning Sensor), a Baygen Freeplay radio, 2 Cobra 40 channel CB radios, 2 Leatherman Pocket Multi-tools, a Coleman stove, an enamelware plates/bowls/coffee mug set, a large “golf” umbrella, 2 Bushnell monoculars, compact Simmons binoculars, a set of heavy duty “chili-bowls”, a pair of Danner brand cowboy boots (unfortunately these never fit even after sending them back and having them replaced, twice), 2 cast iron frying pans, a Black and Decker rechargeable drill, 2 Deitz Kerosene lanterns, a Coleman lantern, Swiss Army Knife (the “real” knife, not a cheap made in China knock-off), 2 backpacks (one made of real leather, the other nylon), 2 sets of steak knives, shorts, swim-trunks, various t-shirts, sweatshirts, jackets, coolers (both Coleman brand and soft-sided nylon types), leather belts, belt buckles, leather gloves, all sorts of luggage and at least a half a dozen different Zippo (again, the real deal, not knock-offs) lighters. That’s just the stuff I can think of off the top of my head.

Other brands of cigarettes have similar programs. Camel, Virginia Slims, Basic and Winston that I know of. In fact, I never smoked Winstons, but, I picked up enough of those off the ground to send away for a real nice Daiwa rod and reel set. And even though I am now a non-smoker, I will continue to pick them up off the ground and stash them away in a drawer for future use.

Thrift shops & Rummage Sales : These places can be gold mines. Sure, most of it is used. But, who cares. If it’s in good condition and you can use it, why not ? I love going to Goodwill and Salvation Army thrift stores. Most of the stuff I’ve found is amazing. I once found an all leather, “supposedly” Hand Made in Mexico, western-style rifle scabbard marked \$2. What a deal ! Even better, when I got to the register to pay for it, the cashier rang it up for only \$1. “Excuse me miss”, I said, “but, I think you under-charged me for this”. “Oh no”, she said, “it’s got a blue tag on it and all blue tags items are 50% off this week”. You may think it’s funny, but, I also once purchased a tuxedo for \$2. Also, the book sections are often filled with hard-cover first editions, many of which have found their way into my personal “library” (including some that are in the special

“military and survival section”). If you’ve never been to a thrift shop, you really should stop in some time. You might be amazed at what you’ll find. Another reason to shop there, besides the good deals, is the profits from these stores benefit some very worthwhile charitable organizations.

Twice a year, the church I’m a member of (Holy Trinity Lutheran in Burbank, Illinois) holds a “rummage-sale”. This is where usually the members donate items that they either don’t want, don’t need or don’t fit into anymore. Mostly clothes and “knick-knacks”, furniture, toys, you name it. Basically it’s a small thrift shop that lasts for a weekend. Here, I’ve been truly blessed. Over the years, the ladies who sort out the items as they’re brought in and place them on the appropriate tables (clothes over here, toys over there, etc..) know that since I was 8 years old, I started collecting “military stuff”. When they come across anything that is military-related (uniforms, web gear, helmets, books, you name it), they usually set it off to the side in the kitchen for me to “check out” before they put it out on the tables. And over the years, I’ve also been personally given uniforms and mementos by several of the veterans who know that I’m a collector. Like I said, I’ve been truly blessed. My hope is that one day, when I get my own home, I want to set up my own “miniature” museum of sorts. What is even more important to me than the material possessions, is the stories behind the items I’ve been given and the fact that they have shared them with me.

These “rummage sales” are held at lots of churches and schools. Once again, the money is going to a good cause. Check them out whenever you get a chance.

Flea Markets & Garage Sales : My advice, get there EARLY ! Some people literally make their living buying stuff at flea markets and garage sales and reselling it because they know they can make a profit. But, if you do get there late and you see something you like, don’t be afraid to “haggle”, especially at garage sales. Most people who have garage sales are having it for the simple reason that they want to get rid of what they consider their “junk”. They would rather take a couple of bucks (or less) for something that, if it’s still there when the sale is over, will probably either end up in the Goodwill or Salvation Army Thrift shop “collection bins” or worse, in next weeks trash pick-up.

Surplus Stores & Gun Shows : Yes, there are still a few “true” surplus stores left around, but, not that many. Most stores that claim to be surplus stores are filled with brand new merchandise. Most of which is made in China or Korea or who knows where. Most of this stuff is junk that won’t last in the field. Yes, you may look sharp in that new “military-style” uniform in that exotic and “authentic” Vietnam “Tiger-Stripe” pattern, but, make sure you also buy yourself a good sewing kit for when it starts to come apart at the seams. Remember, shop around. You get what you pay for.

Gun shows and Military Collectors shows are held practically every weekend in areas all around the country. My usual method is to do a quick “once around”, checking all the tables. If I see something I like, I’ll stop and ask “how much” ? If it seems reasonable, I might buy it on the spot or I might take the chance and finish my “once around”, then go back and if it’s still there, I’m a happy camper. Personally, I don’t “usually” haggle at a gun/military show. The majority of the people who have tables at these shows do this for a living. It’s not like a garage sale. If someone doesn’t buy it from them this weekend, there’s always next weekend at another show. I don’t like to insult people by trying to low-ball them at what may be what it is that puts food on the table for them and their family. However, if it’s obvious that they are asking way too much for something I know I can pick up elsewhere, then I’ll offer what I feel is a fair

price. If they refuse, oh well. Like I said, I know I can find it somewhere else for less money and they just lost a sale.

One thing I will say about gun shows. It's a great place to find good, fair prices on ammunition (most of the time). Sure you may be able to get it for less through mail order, but, then you have to deal with freight charges and that strange look you get from the UPS guy when he is dropping off a couple thousand rounds of ammo every time he comes to your house. Pick up a copy of "Shotgun News" or "Gun List". Both have sections that list gun shows & their dates, locations, etc... When you find one near you, check it out. Plus, most have a place (usually right when you walk in) where you can sign up for their mailing list. Then you'll "usually" get a postcard (sometimes with a coupon for a \$1 off your admittance) for future shows.

Mail Order : There are literally hundreds (if not thousands) of Mail order companies out there that deal with everything under the sun. I won't go into detail in this matter other than to say once again. Shop around. I've had good and bad experiences with mail order when it comes to military and/or survival supplies. Far too many of both to get into in this article. Maybe another time.

I hope some of this information will prove useful to all of you. Once again, you can't go out and get everything you think you'll need all at once (unless you've won the lottery and received that first big installment check). Set your priorities, then set a course of action. Once again, if you can add any advice or have suggestions, please let us know. That's what we're here for. To help each other out. Good luck and God Bless.