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# MEMBERS UPDATE

January 2021

## HOW MUCH LAND DO I NEED?

Top 5 Red Dots on a Budget

Prepper Secrets for Stretching Your Pantry



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## How Much Land Do I Need?

With the winter chill in full effect, there's no better time to stay indoors and do some self-reliance dream building. But before you get excited about all the farm and ranch real estate online, take a clear inventory of your goals and expectations. In this guide, we'll give you a framework for how to think about how many acres you're going to need.



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## Long-Term Food Storage

Most people think they'll need to keep a small grocery store's worth of food buried in the backyard to be truly prepared for an emergency. The good news is you don't need to go to extremes to be prepared for most scenarios. Thus, there are lots of tricks you can use to stretch what's in your pantry if you know what you're doing.



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## Top 5 Red Dots on a Budget

A lot of tactical rifles got unwrapped on Christmas morning, with many recipients pondering the same question: Should I get a red dot? The answer, according to the NSRA, is: Yes, absolutely. Take advantage of the NSRA's extensive field testing to get the scoop on the 5 red dots that will work the hardest for your hard-earned dollars.



# How Much Land Will You Need to be Self-Sufficient?



For many preppers, a self-sufficient homestead is the ideal situation in a world where trains have stopped running and 911 operators no longer wait to answer emergency calls. These preppers envision a life where they provide for themselves and their families by growing crops and raising livestock, but they rarely stop to think about just how much land they would need to make such a lifestyle practical.

The answer to this question will vary in different parts of the country based on factors such as climate and soil quality, but there are other important factors that should be considered before setting off on the road to self-sufficiency.

## What the Experts Say



You can't swing a dead cat in prepper or agricultural circles without hitting an expert of some sort, and they all have different views about how much land is necessary to be self-sufficient. Here's some food for thought:

The United Nations – The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization puts the figure at .17 acres of land per person as long as there is no waste and no land degradation

1BOG.org – An infographic by 1BOG.org indicates that you need about two acres of land for a family of about four. They say that “includes approximately 12,000 sq. feet for wheat, 65 for eggs, 2640 for corn, 100 for dairy, 207 for meat, and 77,000 square feet for vegetables.”

Permaculture fans – Permaculture is fast becoming a buzzword in prepper circles, and this is largely due to claims that these techniques can make a family self-sufficient on just a quarter of an acre of land per person.

Aquaponics advocates – Proponents of aquaculture and hydroponics think even two acres for a family of four is far too much and say that about 50 square feet is all that is needed to grow all the food a prepper can eat.



## Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone



The thing to bear in mind when looking at these figures is that they only represent the amount of land necessary to grow food. However, food alone is not enough to survive. A self-sufficient homestead will also need some form of shelter to live in, a source of potable water and trees that can be felled to provide fuel and building materials.

The numbers also grow larger when livestock is added to the equation, as animals need both space and food. You will also need more acreage if your land is hilly or features depressed spots that are prone to flooding.

Here are just a few of the things you should think about before choosing to go the self-sufficient route.

Land is not a supermarket – You may love jalapeno peppers or eggplants, but that does not mean you will be able to grow them. Find out what crops are grown in your area and build your plans around this information. The golden rule in self-sufficiency is “do as the farmers do.”

Farming is really hard work – Plowing, tilling, weeding and reaping can be backbreaking work to those used to a more comfortable lifestyle. You may also be doing these chores without power tools or agricultural machinery. Expect a steep learning curve and months of aches and pains before you get the hang of it.

Steer clear of fads – Do not be lured into believing that you can grow all of the food you need in the corner of your basement. If this were possible, farmers the world over would have packed up and called it a day years ago.

Keep the critters small – Chickens, rabbits and maybe a couple of goats could provide your family with life-sustaining eggs, meat and milk, but anything bigger is probably a bad idea unless you have a lot of land.

Learn how to avoid spoilage – Freezers and refrigerators may not be an option after the SHTF, so you will have to rely on preservation methods like salting, canning and dehydration to prevent the fruits of all of your hard work going to waste (more on this later).

Strive for balance – Growing food to feed a family and growing food as a business are two very different things. While commercial farmers can concentrate on a single cash crop, you should grow a variety of plants and rotate the areas you grow them on. This will not only enrich the soil and improve your harvests, but it will also help to ensure that you and your loved ones enjoy a balanced diet rich in vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients.

Learn to shoot – Farmers used to spend as much time keeping out trespassing people and animals as they did raising crops. Militaries the world over look to agricultural communities when they need snipers, and you can use a rifle to both hunt and protect what is yours.

## How Much Land Depends on You



Let's touch on farming a little more, and I'm going to discuss it from a first person perspective. Growing up, my grandparents had a subsistence farm. Their farm was a thing of beauty in the mountains of Northeast Georgia, and I remember visits with them and the farm fondly.



They grew crops, raised livestock for meat and milk and had chicken houses for eggs. However, they worked their tails off! Even my mom and aunt pitched in when they were little kids. They had the subsistence farm, but they also sold crops and bartered in the Great Depression and after. All told, they had about 45 acres of land.

They had fresh butter, milk, smoked ham, beef, turkeys a pantry full of canned goods and more. Heck, they even had beehives and farmed honeybees for fresh honey.

If you are not accustomed to some of the hardest work known to mankind or get the slightest bit agoraphobic, farm living is not for you, especially if you expect to do it on a grand scale. If you want a taste of this lifestyle, then start out small. That way you will know if it is for you.

## How Much Land is Needed for Preppers?



If you are acquiring land to be self-sufficient and want a prepper-worthy retreat, keep in mind that the general consensus for land size for a retreat like that is around 5-10 acres. That size will leave enough space around the home and barn to create a good size garden, while still providing enough space for smaller species of livestock. Hopefully, this minimalist tract of property you have in mind contains a wooded area for hunting and trapping and a small pond or creek.

What's more ideal is 15 to 20 acres, and that's assuming that you are mostly eating a vegetarian diet. You may not know this, but back in the old

Sundays! If you want meat every day, you are going to need quite a bit of land to be self-sufficient.

Livestock will require at least 30 acres; heck 50, even. However, don't overextend your budget. In fact, many preppers and homesteaders get by just fine before the SHTF with just one to three acres of land.



## Location, Location

Where you put down stakes is going to determine how much land you need to be self-sufficient, too. A real estate agent might balk if you tell them you want to see land that is located in the sticks. Nevertheless, tell them you want to view isolated land, preferably with a home and barn that can't be seen from roadways.

Unless you're buying a significant amount of land, say more than 100 acres, your homesteading paradise shouldn't border on any highly-traveled roadways...or be within an hour from surrounding cities. If possible, your home shouldn't even be visible to people traveling on lonely country dirt roads near your property.

## Water Aids Self-Sufficiency





Remember that pond or creek we discussed previously? Well, ask a realtor to show you property that has waterways running through it since you never know when you might need it. This is not for show, either, even though rippling brooks and streams are quite relaxing and gorgeous to look at.

If the grid goes down, a flowing creek can be harnessed for hydropower if the homestead and waterway are close to each other and the elevation is ideal. You can also participate in fish farming or stocking ponds if you have small bodies of water on your property.

There are also edible plants for cattle, fish and even humans you can grow and forage for in the pond on your property. Make sure that there are not elevated levels of calcium in your pond if you are growing duckweed, though. The elevated levels can form excess calcium oxalate in it, which is a very unhealthy byproduct.

## Spider Holes Figure into the Plan



If having a plan B becomes necessary, the odds are good that you'll need a move-in ready and well-stocked bunker. With the uncertainty of today, a lot of Americans are buying up personal bunkers. And whether you want to build spider holes, root cellars and bunkers on your land, they are going to take up a lot of room on it, even though they are mostly underground.

Take advantage of the digital blueprints companies such as Rising S Company have for bunkers, too, because once the SHTF, you might have to resort to getting your hand on old-school hand-drafted blueprints. Rising S has anything from economy bunker plans to luxe upgrades.

Using drafting software to design your grand scheme of things and future vision is very helpful, also. You certainly don't want to make monumental concrete changes to your property, only to find out that they don't work. With a mock-up, you can see your vision before it becomes a reality, allowing you to any tweaks that are needed. After all, once you make it a reality, it is going to be very expensive to make sweeping changes.

## Don't Forget the Following

Be sure to include heat and sanitation in your floor plan if you are prepping to survive long-term. In the case of heat, you'll need a fuel source to generate it. Savvy preppers typically have gas and diesel fuel stockpiles covered when resources of it run dry short-term, but what about contingencies for the long-term?





Manufacturing your own biodiesel fuel and then converting a generator to use it could save your life the grid goes down. With this in mind, your retreat should be made up of about 50 percent forest. This option provides you plenty of firewood to cook and keep you warm, and gives you ample opportunities to hunt and trap wild game.

## Waste Management Considerations

You'll need a way to dispose waste set up on your property. The important thing to consider when you're planning is how you are going to set up your sanitation system. For instance, how you set it up is going to depend on whether your property will be used as an off grid retreat or for a survival home that's currently on the grid.



What you don't want to do is permit human, agricultural and livestock sewage to run into the waterways on your property. That mistake can spread nasty germs and chemicals, all of which can be potentially fatal come doomsday when there aren't many doctors around. In cases of private wells, water run-off from precipitation can contaminate the ones on your property. Have a professional check if you hear strange sounds coming from the system or notice a strange odor, taste, or cloudiness present in your water.



You might want to look into a gravity fed system that comes with the composting commode because the system is friendly for off grid living and affordable. Properly installed outhouses work just as well, too.

## Plan Enough Land for the Critters



When planning for enough land to be self-sufficient, it's a good idea to research how much land your livestock needs. You'll want to ensure animals have enough space to live comfortably and be without health risks. Another thing that's good to know is how much they eat and how they need to be sheltered. There are plenty of YouTube videos and books on how to do this correctly. That being said, let's discuss a good starter critter, the goat.

## Consider Having Goats

Goats are great farm animals to have because they are low maintenance and provide numerous benefits to their owners. Goat milk is nutrient rich, and their voracious eating habits guarantee that grass and brush will stay short, the latter of which will prevent fires from breaking out on your property. Here are some important things you'll need when raising goats:

**Adequate indoor space** – Goats require about a 10 to 15 square feet per critter if they spend a small portion of their time indoors. If you have several of them, try to have an area where they can all sleep together. Several of them can sleep together in the 10 to 15 square feet area or individual tiny pens if they are provided an area to move around in during daylight hours.



Shelter from the elements – In addition to the area they sleep, Goats will need shelter that gives them shade on sunny days. Shelters also keep them from getting wet in the rain and gives protection from cold during the winter. The shelter should be about 20 square feet per critter. The area also needs to be big enough so that the goats are able to stand comfortably and not cause them not knock another one of their brethren out of the area, especially if you live in a cold climate or have snowy winters.



Space for grazing – Adequate space for goats to graze is essential if you plan to let them graze off the land. Each animal requires an area of about 30 to 50 square feet that allows them to munch fresh grass. If your goats can't get enough fresh grass daily, you will also need to supplement their diet with foods such as grain and hay.

Exercise – Goats need to have about 30 square feet per critter to stay active enough. Doing so will keep them healthy and keep you from having fat goats. If you plan on expanding their community at some point, enclose an area big enough to contain all of the goats that you intend to buy. In the winter, these little guys don't require as much exercise, but they still should have enough room to move around in that's larger than a small pen.

## The Beginning is the Most Important Part

It is said that arithmetic has no mercy, and many a dream has been dashed against the rocks of cold reality. While calculating the amount of land you would need to be self-sufficient may be an enjoyable way to pass a few hours, finding the answer to this question will not help you to survive a brutal winter, scorching summer or bad harvest.

If you plan to be self-sufficient after the fall, your first priority should be gathering the information and learning the skills you will need to prosper. Find out about the soil in your area and what local farmers grow in it, learn how to preserve food without refrigeration and join a gym to acquire the strength and stamina you will need to make self-sufficiency a practical strategy.



As you can see, it can be easy to fall in love with a piece of land, but it's more important to find property that is suitable for self-sufficiency. Browsing for the ideal tract of land to turn into a bugout location or prepper retreat in addition to a farm has levels of complexity that is going to be different, depending on your needs and tastes. Fortunately, you have taken an exciting step along the journey to being self-sufficient. Once you have that loan pre-approval letter in-hand, stuff starts to get very real. At last, it's finally time to sign a contract on your acreage after all your persistence and commitment. This is a new and essential stage of your life, and you should be congratulated.







## How to Stretch Your Pantry with Long-Term Food Storage

If there's one thing that COVID-19 has taught us – aside from how seemingly impossible it is for most people to simply stay at home – it's that a SHTF situation will absolutely disrupt grocery stores and the movement of the food chain supply. Keep in mind that all the recent issues weren't caused solely by hoarding, either. For instance, the spread of the virus through meatpacking plants wreaked havoc on that particular portion of the supply chain.

As survivalists, we all know that we should have a well-stocked pantry that contains staple items and lots of non-perishable goods. For those who are new to this process, we will include some tips in this article about what type of food you should gather. Going beyond that, we'll also look at how to properly store your food for the long haul. After all, if you don't store it correctly, your food may not be edible when you need it the most.

### What Exactly is Considered Long-Term?

The federal government always advises everyone to keep at least three days' worth of food and water on hand. That's a good start, but it's never going to get you through a serious emergency of any consequential length. We believe that it's imperative to think in terms of weeks and months instead of days.

of two to three weeks' worth of food by picking up an extra item or two each time you shop. Again, this isn't going to help you survive long-term, but it will still put you in a much better position than the majority of American consumers.

A better idea is to invest in enough food and water to last for at least three months. By some calculations, this is actually medium-term storage in terms of the food's duration. However, it will make it possible to focus on satisfying meals that are nutritionally sound and won't cause you or your family to become too bored.

Long-term storage, on the other hand, signifies the need to gather enough supplies for more than three months. This often leads to a more regimented approach, which may not be as tasty or varied. Additionally, the approach should be put together with your family's daily caloric needs in mind.

Now that you know what is typically meant by these terms, let's take the concept of long-term storage and flip it around a bit. The primary focus of this article is less about how much food you've gathered and more about how to make your supplies remain edible for as long as possible. This is something you should be focused on regardless of whether your food quantity will get you through a short, medium, or long length of time after the SHTF.

**8** Even if you have extremely limited space and a tight budget, you should be able to gather a minimum



## Ideal Food Storage Solutions for the Long-Term

There are many things you need to consider when choosing how and where to store food. The most important things to remember are that you need:

- A dry, cool space
- An area where the food/water won't be exposed to any chemicals
- A storage place that won't expose food to potential leaks
- Moisture-proof and air-tight packaging/storage solutions
- Safeguards against rodents and insects

## What is Gained from Ideal Storage Conditions?



It's easy to state the bullet points listed above, but do you know why they're so important? Let's take a closer look to find out.

**Temperature** – The ideal temperature for food storage is 40 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. If that's not possible, aim for a minimum climate of room temperature (which is 68 to 72 degrees). This means that your garage or attic are automatically out because those areas tend to have wildly fluctuating temperatures.

Allowing yourself to use a room temperature spot (70 degrees) in the home instead of a more climate-controlled area (60 degrees) can cut your food's shelf life in half. Even worse, if the temperature goes up to a downright balmy 80 degrees, you'll be looking at only 25 percent of the shelf life that 60 degrees would have given you.

As you can see, maintaining proper food quality and a high shelf life requires a dedicated approach, which is why some survivalists have a separate room in their home that maintains a temperature around 60 degrees all year long. This isn't nearly as important for short to medium-term storage, but it can become a very big deal if you're expecting your supplies to last for a long time.

**Lighting Conditions** – A dark area is preferred for two main reasons. First, it's more likely to remain cool. Secondly, research indicates that light exposure can cause reactions in your stored food that may negatively affect the overall nutritional value. Vitamins A, E, and D, along with protein, are the most susceptible to this issue. For ultimate protection, use opaque containers that are stored in the dark.

**Avoiding Contamination** – Rodents and insects are something you definitely need to worry about with long-term storage. Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take that will drastically reduce your risk of developing these issues.

Don't store food containers on the ground. Instead, place buckets and other storage containers on shelves or on top of old pallets. Next, make the food hard to get to. In other words, if you have food stored in Mylar bags, place those bags inside a sealable bucket to keep it well sealed.

Oxygen provides insect eggs with the ability to hatch. Because these eggs are sometimes found naturally inside grains and other foods, you need to prevent them from hatching. Mylar bags are a great way to do this as they prevent exposure to oxygen and light. Of course, rodents can chew open Mylar bags, which is why you'll want to put the bags into buckets.

## How Long Can Food Really Last?

Did you know that food expiration dates usually have next to nothing to do with how long food is actually good for? Chips are one of the very few items that strictly adhere to their listed expiration date, and even then they are often tasty for another week or two.





Expiration dates on food are little more than the manufacturer's guess about how long the item in question will still be at its optimal flavor and freshness. Some of the food industry's standards include one year for cereal and two years for dry pasta. But if you focus on low-moisture foods and use proper storage techniques, you can stretch your supplies much, much longer.

To give you an idea of what we mean, archeologists have discovered wheat from 4,000 years ago that was still edible, due primarily to it being stored inside a sealed Egyptian tomb. You can easily double the listed shelf life of your dry goods by focusing on proven storage solutions in your home. In optimal conditions, you could stretch the following foods for as long as 20 to 30 years before they stop being edible and nutritious.

The fact that they last so long makes the items listed ideal for long-term storage. Therefore, they should all be on your list of foods to procure for your SHTF prep.

### What Non-Perishable Items Have the Shortest Shelf Life?



Survivalist sites all tell you the same thing: stock up on non-perishable goods. While this is good advice, it fails to capture the nuanced nature of each individual food type. Not all non-perishable goods are created equally, and this is important to remember when you're deciding what deserves your precious pantry space.

We've looked at items that can last for several decades. But what about those that are lucky to make it a full year before they become more or less inedible? Here's a look at some of the worst offenders:

#### Dry pasta

Beans

Rice

Wheat

Oats

Dried apples

Lentils

Peas

Salt

Sugar

Honey

Potato flakes

Freeze dried food

Baking soda

Baking powder

#### Nuts

Oils

Nut butters

Dried eggs

Pickles

Canned tomatoes

Canned peaches

Now, each of these items can serve a very good purpose, ranging from enhancing your cooking to giving you a good serving of protein. In other



words, it's not necessarily wise to discount them altogether. What you will need to do, though, is ensure that you regularly rotate your stock of these items. Don't let them sit unused for so long that they go bad. Doing this would quickly lead to losing money and even an extremely dire situation if you were relying on these staples for survival come TEOTWAWKI time.

We always recommend stocking your shelves by expiration date anyway, so just keep these items toward the front and eat them before their time is up. This practice will enable you to replace them without guilt since you will have gotten your money's worth.

### Helpful Containers for Pantry Storage

We've mentioned how useful Mylar bags stored inside of thick, sealed plastic tubs can be. We also know that this solution isn't going to be ideal for everyone's budget or storage space. Every solution has its pros and cons, so let's take a closer look to find out what options are best for you:

**Glass Jars** – These are easy to find, relatively inexpensive, and can hold a large amount of dry goods. Water and air won't seep into these non-permeable containers, and you don't have to worry about anything leaching into the food or bacteria building up. The wide variety of sizes is also fantastic as this makes it very simple to arrange your pantry accordingly.

On the downside, glass jars are heavier than many other storage solutions, so you'll need to make sure you don't overload your shelves. Additionally, the fragile nature of glass must always be taken into consideration. Finally, clear glass will expose your food to harmful light unless you store it in a dark place.

**#10 Cans** – These cans come with a food grade enamel coating, which makes them ideal for long-term storage of low-oil, shelf stable foods that have a moisture content of 10 percent or below. Even better, each of these sealed cans is lightweight, and they provide the complete moisture and oxygen barrier that's needed for the best possible results.

**11** You'll also benefit from being able to open only the small amount you need per meal.

The main potential negative of #10 cans are that they cannot be resealed and there's a possibility of rust developing if you live in a humid environment.

**Plastic Bottles** – Bottles that say PET or PETE near the recycling symbol on the bottom of the bottle are great for storing dry goods. Never use one of these bottles if it held anything other than food or liquid, though. Also, you must take very diligent measures to ensure that you clean the bottles well enough before putting them into action as a storage solution.

These easy to manage, small bottles are ideal for legumes and grains. However, there are a few caveats you must be aware of. First off, the plastic is thin enough for rodents to chew through it. That's why many people seal these bottles into a box or bucket. Sealing the bottles away is also wise as it will reduce exposure to light.

We recommend using a funnel when you fill these bottles. Also, be sure to shake the contents down several times throughout the filling process. This will eliminate unwanted dead air space.

**Mylar Bags** – We've mentioned Mylar bags a few times already, so here's a quick recap, along with a few new details you should know. Mylar bags contain food grade aluminum and plastic. They create a solid barrier against insects and moisture. All it takes to seal a filled Mylar bag is a flat iron or clothes iron.

Although many believe that Mylar bags offer a true oxygen barrier, that isn't necessarily the case. Depending on how well they're sealed, a slight amount of oxygen may transfer into the bags over time. Additionally, you must secure these bags properly or they'll end up becoming rodent food.

Because the bags are more fragile than other storage solutions, they also won't last as long as #10 cans. As previously mentioned, it's best to store these bags inside a sealed plastic bucket.

**Plastic Buckets** – When you go shopping for plastic buckets, make sure they have gasket seals and are made from food grade plastic. Anything else won't be sufficient for long-term food storage



needs. Make sure you don't reuse a bucket that previously held anything other than food.

These buckets can be used in a couple of ways. Some people fill them with grains. But the most common usage for plastic buckets is filling them with food items that are sealed in Mylar bags or come in other plastic or cardboard packaging. Examples of items you can store in plastic buckets include:



Even sealed, these containers can't promise that insects won't affect your food. That's because some grains and other items may have come with naturally occurring eggs. On the plus side, if such a calamity does befall the food inside a bucket, the bucket will prevent those critters from getting out and harming other food in your pantry.

## Using Oxygen Absorbers for Longer Food Life



Oxygen absorbers are one of the absolute best ways to increase the longevity of food storage. These little packets (which look like silica packets but are not the same thing) are even more effective than vacuum sealing. By removing the oxygen

and leaving the nitrogen behind, you'll inhibit the growth of any insects and allow the food to have a longer lifespan.

**WARNING:** Please note that you should never, ever use oxygen absorbers when storing any food with more than 10 percent moisture or a medium to high amount of oil. Failure to heed this warning could lead to botulism.

These helpful packets can be used with the following storage solutions:

**Glass canning jars (make sure they have gaskets and metal lids)**

**PET/PETE bottles with screw on, airtight lids**

**#10 cans that have seamed lids**

**Mylar pouches**

These packets will not do much inside a plastic bucket and are not recommended for that use. However, they can (and often should) go inside Mylar pouches that are going to be stored inside a plastic bucket.

Directions for Use – Take one new oxygen absorber and place it inside the applicable storage device (#10 can, Mylar pouch, etc.), then seal the container within 15 to 20 minutes. Each oxygen absorber is good for up to one gallon, so you may need to use more than one, depending on the size of your containers.

If you must use a plastic container for storing food, use dry ice to avoid insects.

## More on Botulism

What you really need to know about botulism is how to avoid it. There are certain types of food that naturally have a moisture content that exceeds 10 percent. Avoid using a moisture absorber with foods such as:

**Nuts**

**Granola**





**Vegetables/Fruits (the one exception is if they've been completely dried)**

**Brown sugar**

**Dried meats**

**Ready to eat snacks (granola bars, beef jerky, trail mix, candy bars, etc.)**

If you ingest food with botulism, you could end up suffering from a long list of symptoms such as:

**Difficulty speaking or swallowing**

**Abdominal cramps**

**Dry mouth**

**Double or blurred vision**

**Facial weakness**

**Nausea**

**Vomiting**

**Trouble breathing**

**Drooping eyelids**

**Paralysis**

The side effects of botulism don't happen immediately. In most cases, you'll begin to feel sick in 18 to 36 hours. However, there have also been documented cases of people developing symptoms in as few as six hours and in as long as 10 days.

Very mild symptoms may go away on their own, but most people who develop a bout of botulism need emergency medical assistance. Otherwise, it can be fatal. Even with proper medical care, it can take between 10 days to several months for an affected person to begin feeling fully normal again. Those who battle a severe case of botulism may not recover completely for years.

As you can see, botulism would be terrible even during normal circumstances. But if you were to be affected by it during a SHTF scenario, you could find yourself in life-threatening peril without the possibility of getting medical aid. Therefore, be very, very careful when you're canning and storing food.

## **Other Options for Keeping Food Insect Free**

Oxygen absorbers are the best and easiest method of avoiding insects in most situations. There are, however, several other options to choose from when you're putting together a long-term food storage pantry, including:

- Silica Gel/Desiccant (stick with Tyvex packaging for food usage)
- Dry Ice
- Freezing
- Diatomaceous Earth (only use the type that's safe for food; steer clear of the version for pool filters)

## **Moving food like grains into plastic or metal containers**

If you do find bugs in your stash, throw away all the effected food and vacuum your prepper pantry. Then ward off a future infestation by wiping the shelves with a safe repellent such as citronella, eucalyptus, and tea tree oils.

## **Final Thoughts**

Another thing that COVID-19 has taught us in the US is that we can truly only rely on ourselves. After all, many neighbors nationwide refused to work well together during the health crisis, with some people literally duking it out in the middle of grocery store aisles for a package of toilet paper. Can you imagine how these people would react if they couldn't get to a grocery store at all?

That's why it's more important now than ever to take steps to protect you and your family. Long-term food storage (both in the context of the food's lifespan and in how long you could live off of it) is one of the best methods available to ensure your family doesn't suffer from starvation and nutritional deficiencies during an apocalyptic situation.

And, as always, we recommend arming yourself with weapons you know how to use so that you can defend what's yours if your neighbors decide to try and rob you due to their lack of preparation.





# Top 5 Red Dots on a Budget

With Christmas in our rearview, this is the time of year when we get a flurry of questions about what type of tactical optic to mount on fill-in-the-blank tactical rifle. Of course, that's because lots of good little boys and girls woke up on Christmas morning to find a shiny new modern sporting rifle under the tree. Even if that didn't happen, others discovered a gift card in their stocking that's now burning a hole in their pocket.

Does this sound like you? If so, you've cracked open the right self-reliance magazine. We've run loads of field tests on tactical shooting gear throughout the past year. Because of that, we're not going to beat around the bush: The jury's in, and we recommend a red dot.

We don't mean to sound flippant, but after running all types of optics on a wide array of ARs and such, the most versatile class of optics offering the best gains in performance is the "red" dot. Now, were all of the dots literally red? No. Were all of the reticles simple dots? No again.

Still, the fact remains that this class of optics defies

ways, even defying its own name. Whereas some shooters love to preach about the iron sight, the red dot almost always proves less clumsy and more accurate. And where a long-range shooter might shake his head at mounting an unmagnified optic on a centerfire rifle, a traditional 3-9 power rifle scope quite simply makes tactical shooting slow and sluggish.

## What Exactly is a Red Dot?

As we mentioned in the introduction, this class of optics refuses to limit itself to the color red or even the circular shape for which it's named. The fact is this type of sight comes in a lot of varying shapes and configurations. Meanwhile, the underlying concept is the same, no matter which type you're looking through.

That is, a glowing reticle is superimposed onto your sight picture plane... never straining your focus and always dialed in on zero.

The reason red dots are so effective is that, given their low magnification (often 1X), these sights minimize any parallax or distortion observed with



a high-power scope. This distortion happens when your eye isn't perfectly centered with the scope, making the crosshairs "float" off of zero. Red dots also maximize eye relief. That is to say, the shooter's eye doesn't have to be in the absolute perfect spot to get a full and accurate sight picture.

Put those factors together, and you have a forgiving sight that favors speed while still giving you an impossible-to-miss bright glowing reticle that's always dialed in on zero, something akin to a bionic eye for shooters.

The result is an optic that's not just more accurate than iron sights but much faster in terms of target acquisition – no front and rear sight alignment is necessary. And unlike a sight with higher magnification, the shooter has a much larger field of view with a red dot, allowing for instantaneous orientation when sighting targets through the optic.

## The Military's Strategic Use of Sights



While this optic can certainly be used for hunting large game, the purpose and field for which the modern red dot was developed is for tactical use. In fact, the US Armed Forces adopted the red dot

sight in 2001 after field trials showed the advantages of this technology on accuracy and speed. This was also the sight used to eliminate Osama Bin Laden in the now famous Navy SEAL Team 6 midnight raid. In that operation, Seal member Rob O'Neil told Esquire that he was able to place two rounds in Bin Laden's forehead in nearly pitch-black darkness.

Despite the marketing, these sights aren't exactly a cutting-edge technology, as they've been used in various forms of military targeting systems since World War I. And though it's been proven effective for many decades, the adoption in the consumer market came after the military gave this technology its blessing.

So, while the technology isn't all that "new," that doesn't exactly mean it isn't revolutionary. You might say that recent innovations have adapted this technology for tactical use in a major way. Rifles, pistols and even shotguns are now being decked out with red dots, and for various types of applications.

In fact, one version of the US Military's standard issue sidearm, the Sig Sauer M17, is outfitted with a red dot sight. And while there are many uses for these sights on handguns and shotguns, by far the most common pairing is the red dot and modern sporting rifle. That's what we'll be focusing on here.

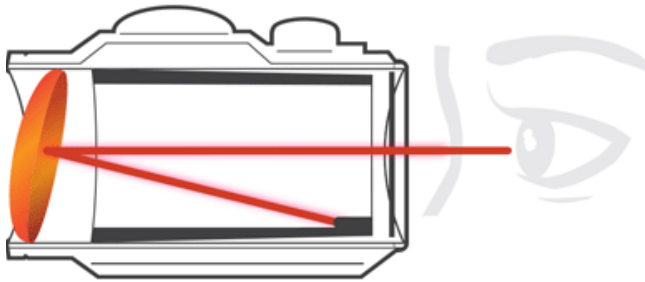
All of the red dots on our list perform exceptionally well with the firearms for which they were designed. Heck, they'll probably work wonders on a crossbow, but we digress. The key thing here is that all of these units are compatible with the standard mounting systems you find on almost all tactical rifles and bolt actions alike. Thus, the main differences you'll find in these models comes down to size, configuration (tube vs heads-up), and technology (holographic vs. reflex).

## Reflex vs. Holographic Red Dots

It's easy to downplay the difference between these two technologies, but it is very helpful to understand when you're comparing these sights. To the end user, the difference is not all that clear, i.e. both technologies project a glowing dot onto your field of view and you use them in the same way.



A couple of general differences are price (holographic is more expensive), configuration (most holographic sights feature a “heads-up” configuration), and reticle variety. Reflex red dots tend to offer more variety in terms of aiming shapes and colors. Some optics offer the ability to toggle between red, green, and blue dots. Others, like the MCG Red Dot, offer not only multiple colors, but also several reticle shapes to select.



When it comes to the actual technology, here’s a quick rundown: Reflex red dots are called such because they utilize an aiming reticle that is projected onto a lightly mirrored objective lens (the lens facing the object you’re targeting). This superimposed image is then reflected back to your eye.

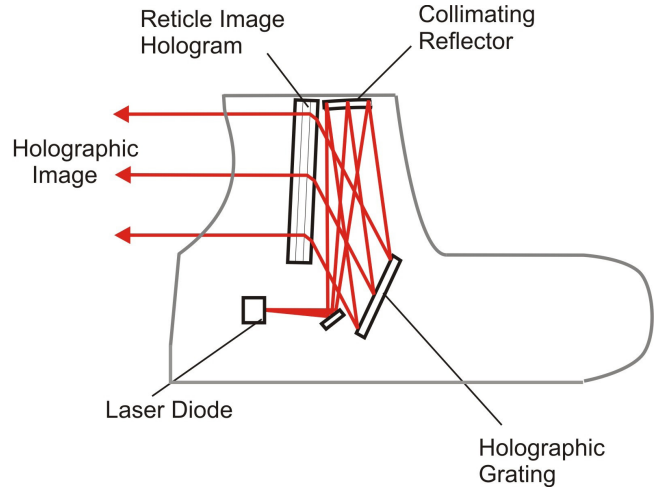
Reflex sights are more common than their holographic counterparts and the technology, as we mentioned, is over 100 years old. But if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, right? Reflex optics are very accurate and also affordable.

They also come in a variety of configurations, the main ones being a tube type (which looks like a sawed-off riflescope) and the “heads up” version, which utilizes only an objective lens (like the MCG Red Dot Sight).

While there aren’t many downsides with the reflex technology, one factor to consider because the objective lens is partially mirrored, is that it blocks a bit of the sight’s light gathering ability. In addition, the curvature of the glass can create a bit of a parallax effect, where the “dot” appears to move around as the shooter’s head position changes. But parallax is very minimal with red dots, since the magnification is typically 1X.

Holographic red dots use a laser and mirrors to

float in front of the shooter up to 50 yards. The laser is sandwiched in between two layers of glass and allows for slightly better light gathering than a reflex optic.



Holographic sights tend to feature a glowing red ring with a dot in the middle as the aiming reticle. While green options are getting more common, the vast majority of holographic sights use red.

So, is more expensive actually better? The answer varies slightly based on your occupation. If you are a professional soldier or security personnel, then the cost of your optic is an investment in your business, and therefore, you can justify spending \$400 on a holographic red dot.

In short, we here at the NSRA believe that a reflex red dot is a better fit for the vast majority of shooters. There are many more features and configurations to choose from in the reflex category. Thus, you pay for the features you want, not just the technology.

That’s why all of the nominees on this list use reflex technology. You can spend plenty of money on a reflex red dot in a heartbeat, and they are plenty high tech as well. Now without further ado, let’s get to those red dots.

## MCG Red Dot

Let’s begin with a little in-house recommendation, since it is available at a 60% discount thanks to our partners at MyCrisisGear. We’ve done a lot of gear testing and there really is no better value out there than the MCG Red Dot.





extremely beneficial.

The MCG Red Dot is bright enough to see in blazing sunny conditions and can be easily dialed back for a nighttime varmint hunt. Battery life is excellent. We've been using a test model quite heavily for over 18 months on the very same CR2032 battery it showed up with.



The integrated Picatinny/Weaver base will mount on almost any rail you're going to come across. This sight is durable enough for running tactical drills or taking it backpacking, while still being compact enough to make it a good option for rimfire guns or even a large revolver.

The one shortcoming of this design is the unit's height. If you are mounting this on a weapon with a traditional AR-15 style A2 style gas block front sight, then you will need to add a riser to the equation to see over the front sights. To co-witness with the A2 setup, you'll likely need a .75" riser.

## Bushnell TRS-25

Another high-value red dot that is tried and true is the Bushnell TRS-25, and it provides an excellent way to upgrade your weapon's capability while still saving some cash for customizing your mounting setup. However, this optic will also need a riser to



clear the A2 front sights on some rifles and for comfortable shooting position on others.

**Disclaimer:** This is a good place to reiterate one of our favorite disclaimers. When you go to mount an optic on ANY weapon, we highly recommend giving yourself several options. Whether it's scope rings, risers, new rail systems, etc., sometimes the key factor in your mounting setup isn't the optic itself. Instead, it may be the geometry of your mounting hardware (just look at the nearby photo).



The best thing you can do to get the most out of your optic aid is to make sure it's configured to give you a comfortable shooting position. Some rifles, ARs in particular, tend to require a really low head position to get a cheek weld. This position isn't very comfortable for some shooters. Risers can work wonders in this type of situation.

Now that the disclaimer is out of the way, let's get back to discussing the features of the Bushnell TRS-25 again.

The Bushnell TRS-25 has what some shooters refer to as a "micro" red dot, meaning that it's compact. And at 25mm, it's not the largest tube you can find, but it is a function of the micro aspect that appeals to a lot of Bushnell's market. In our view (not to make a pun), we find that 25mm is perfectly sufficient enough to feel like you can get a sight picture and get on target quickly. Therefore, we don't recommend going any smaller.

The Bushnell TRS-25 has one reticle option, a red dot. On the other hand, it offers an almost comical 11 brightness settings to choose from. The



designers clearly got a little carried away with that knob. The factor that distinguishes this Bushnell from the rest of the pack are the little things. For one thing, rubber gaskets in the knobs protect the sight from water damage. For another, its nitrogen-filled scope ensures interior optical surfaces are fog-proof.



This sight also comes with top-notch silicone lens covers that are tethered to each other. That being said, they aren't tethered to the optic as much as we'd prefer. Still, at a cost saving \$70 price, you don't get every last feature that are standard on a \$300 red dot. One of those features would be the convenient auto shutoff feature for the absentminded. Like most sights under \$100, the TRS-25 will require you to "think" and remember to turn your sight off manually.

With a precision oriented 3MOA dot, the TRS-25 is not a one-trick, close-range pony, and you can expect to shoot nice-sized groups at medium-long distances with it. The adjustment knobs move the sight 1MOA per click, though, so don't expect to shoot sniper-level groups at 100 yards.

All in all, this Bushnell is still a great optic at a great value. Yes, you may decide at some point to upgrade to a Vortex or EOTech, but you'll undoubtedly keep this optic around for another build. It's a dyed in the wool budget red dot.

## NC Star 35mm Red/Green/Blue Dot

Ok, so let's start by acknowledging that this optic has possibly the worst name ever. It's pretty ridiculous, but if you are a value-oriented shopper you might appreciate the fact that NcStar puts all their money in their product instead of marketing/advertising.



Thus, you get an excellent optic at the best price without any added BS. For the purpose of this review, we're just going to call this the 35mm for everyone's sake.

NcStar's 35mm is an excellent value optic for a ton of reasons, but our favorite feature of this model is the mounting riser. It's not super tall, but it does elevate the optic to co-witness with some of the most common AR configurations. We also tested and found that the forward cantilever on the integrated mounting hardware offered the most comfortable shooting position straight out of the box than all of the other sights listed.



We're also big fans of the tethered caps on the adjustment knobs. We're sure you've found that these things are notorious for getting lost. And when they do, your delicate

optic is exposed to the harsh elements. We're not sure if the rubber tethers actually form a completely waterproof seal, but they certainly seem to come close.

The size of this optic is great for most tactical carbines, and the generous 35mm objective lens is the biggest of any others on our list. The 35mm also comes standard with flip-up lens covers, which we think add a ton of lifetime value to this optic. Lens covers are much like the adjustment knob caps. They're constantly getting lost and then your optic is much more susceptible to getting scratches on the lenses or, even worse, cracked.

The reticle is of the simple dot variety, but it offers selectable red, green, or blue options with three brightness settings each. The FDE finish is very well done on this optic, and it looks great while it's protecting your 35mm from rust. For all the features on this optic, it's hard to believe it's sold for under \$60.



## Barska AC13160 1x30 HQ Red Dot Sight



If you've been eyeing the Vortex Strikefire II for its crisp look, the 30mm tube, and the advanced looking controls but would like a quick \$100 off, check out this Barska. Both sights are made in China, but the Barska is half the price for the simple reason of being the "Barska" brand instead of the more established "Vortex" brand.

Now obviously, the Strikefire II is a cutting-edge optic, and it is still considered a very good value by Vortex devotees. But for half the price, the Barska is considered an even better value for a comparable sight.

This sight features multi-coated lenses, flip up caps, and an integrated quick-release mount which is super handy. You can remove your red dot to clean your rifle and more. Afterward, you can reinstall it quickly without losing zero.



par with any other sight with this type of coating, however.

The orange coating on the objective lens is excellent for reducing glare, but we found the coating wasn't the best for light gathering. It's certainly on

**19** The reticle brightness is adjustable, and the controls make it easy for you to find your ideal setting

without a clunky knob. One unique feature you get with the Barska is an auto-brightness setting that allows you to easily let the sight adjust to the lighting conditions at the range.

It's frustrating going from store to store looking for the right watch battery needed for many red dots, and the Barska has a feature that gets around this. Even though this sight has an excellent battery life rating, you'll appreciate the fact that it uses a common AAA battery you can pick up just about anywhere. All things considered, we say this is a very solid, very high-tech option at the \$100 price point.

## Sig Sauer Romeo 5



As is often the case, we saved the best for last. The Romeo 5 isn't the least expensive optic on this list. In fact, it's the priciest option we've nominated by a good margin. However, it's also the most durable, battle-worthy of the bunch, making it a solid, direct

competitor to the \$400 EOTechs and Aimpoints out there.

Don't get us wrong, all of these optics will hold up to rigorous use in tough conditions. But it's the only model we'd expect to survive a fall from a 3rd story balcony, a dunk in mucky pond water, and extreme temperature changes without missing a beat. That's what you get for that extra money, and it's the reason why many shooters are adamant that the Romeo 5 is worth every penny.

Additionally, the Romeo 5's waterproof IPX7-rated features puts it in a higher weight class than the others on this list. It also comes standard with 2 mounts, a low-rise mount and a co-witness mount. The 2MOA dot is crisp and ideal for printing tight groups. It's got 10 illumination settings as well as night vision compatibility settings. As you can probably tell, this is a pretty serious battle-ready optic.



Another noteworthy feature on these Sig optics is something they call MOTAC technology. The illumination is motion activated, shutting off after it sits still for a period of time and activating again when it detects motion. This handy motion feature ensures that when you pick up your rifle, the red dot is automatically glowing and ready, and there is no need to flip a switch or turn a dial.



Thanks to the MOTAC feature, the battery life is advertised at 40,000 hours also. If that's true, you're talking about a lifetime battery situation. Hard to imagine, but we haven't heard anyone contradict the battery life claims.

There are lots of impressive things about this sight, but perhaps the most impressive is the reasonable price. We're very budget conscious here at the NSRA, often recommending the less expensive option when paying more doesn't get you more. If you are a serious sharpshooter, the \$160-175 you will pay for the high caliber Romeo 5 is certainly worth the extra expense.

Sig was able to add a ton of value to this optic with 2 mounting options, insanely good battery life, and MOTAC illumination while keeping it significantly less expensive than your Aimpoints and EOTechs. If you've got room in your budget for this sight, the Romeo 5 is an excellent value for your money.

## Final Thoughts

As you can see from this all-reflex list of budget-friendly red dots, this technology is extremely versatile, offering you lots of sizes and configurations, even when you try to narrow down

of features to suit you will take some trial and error. The good news is that you've got a list of excellent options.

That being said, if you were to back us into a corner for an endorsement, we'd definitely go with a high/low style recommendation.

If you're dipping your toes in the water so to speak, there's no beating the MCG Red Dot Sight for \$44.95 shipped right to your door. With 4 reticles, 2 colors, and a sleek heads-up design, this sight is the most versatile on the list. It's equally suited for ARs, bolt actions, rail-equipped handguns, and rimfire weapons.

For more about this this, take advantage of the NSRA's 60% off discount at: [MyCrisisGear.com/reddot](https://www.mycrisisgear.com/reddot)

On the other hand, if you're looking for the last red dot you'll ever need (and you're willing to pay for it), then our recommendation is the Sig Sauer Romeo 5, without question. Based on the torture tests we've seen with this sight shrug off, combined with its MOTAC battery life, this sight has a scratch for just about every itch a shooter is going to come up with.

If you got a new MSR this Christmas that needs an optic, the best advice we can offer is to remember to enjoy building out your rifle. Test out different styles and mounting configurations until your rig is decked out to your specifications. Your goal is to make shooting fun and comfortable. Once you do, you'll spend more time at the range and less time watching gun videos on YouTube.





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