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Life in a jar

The Insider Picks team writes about things we think we like. Business Insider has affiliate partnerships, so we get a portion of the revenue from your purchase. Libbey/Business Insider Mason jars are one of those simple items that are great to have but easy to take for granted. Named after American inventor John Landis Mason, Mason jars stand out by their airtight screw-top lids (usually with a two-piece design), glass construction, and old-fashioned American aesthetics that haven't changed much since they were first patented in the 19th century. Glass Mason jars are usually used for preserving perishable foods, and they are useful for many other things as well. Canning homemade goodies including jams, storing dry foods like herbs and spices, and operating as airtight containers for keeping things like coffee or pipe tobacco fresh (two of my personal favorite uses). They are also often used as decorative items, to hold candles, or even for drinking, as the popularity of Mason pot mugs has shown. True Mason jars should always be made of glass, not plastic, and have a lid that creates an airtight seal. Two-piece Mason pot closures are usually fitted with a rubber rim under the flat part of the lid. This is pressed firmly on the opening of the pot by the ring part of the lid, or band, which screws down, causing a tight seal. These lids also usually have a popper in the middle. After spending time in the fridge, after being cooked for canning, or if the pot contains something that consumes oxygen, a tightly sealed lid will pop when opened due to the air pressurized inside. There is little reason to go cheap with this one. American-made Mason jars don't cost much at all and can last forever, so it's worth going for high quality brand names. Ball and Kerr are the two biggest names in the Mason jar business (and the ones you might already be familiar with yourself), but there are some other brands worth checking out that we've included as well. Mason jars come in a variety of shapes and sizes, so no matter what you need for your home, chances are we've got it covered. From small four-ounce jelly jars to treated drinking glasses, read on for the five best Mason jars you buy now. Here are the best Mason jars you buy now. Read on in the slides below to check out our top picks. Ball When shopping for Mason jars, Ball is the name you're going to see the most. The Ball Corporation has been making pots and other home canning products since 1880 and remains high quality Mason jars offer to this day. Your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents probably used ball pots. You even hear many people referring to all Mason jars in general as Ball pots. I have a simple rule that I apply to many things around the house: If it's grandma- and grandpa-approved, it's probably solid. I have personally used Ball Mason Mason for years, though not for canning jams or other kitchen creations as I'm not much of a home chef. I use mine to store pipe tobacco and coffee beans. I have about 18 of them (in different sizes) for these purposes and they are all well made with airtight lids that have kept their seal after years of regular use. If there is an error, it is that the rubber edge of the lids tends to absorb and retain the aromas of the contents of the pot. I use the term error loosely because this is something that will affect all two-piece lid designs that feature this rubber seal. It is the rubber itself that likes to hold on to smells, and this allows a bear to get out. White vinegar weeks help, but do not completely eliminate lingering odors. This may or may not be a problem for you, depending on what you're using your jars for, but you can easily buy new lids separately as it is. On the bright side, the lids do exactly what they need to do and are covered at the bottom to prevent certain foods (especially acid ones) from reacting with and tarnishing the contents of the jar. Ball Mason jars can be used for just about anything and are still made here in the United States, just as you would expect from an all-American classic. Even better: They are super cheap at less than a dollar per pot when you order by the dozen. They'll probably last forever, too. Pros: Made in America, durable glass enclosures, two-piece lid design seals tight, heat- and freezer-safe, raised measurement markings on the side, and they're super cheap by the dozenCons: The rubber seals on the lids absorb and retain odorsBuy the Ball Mason jars (4 oz., 12 count) from Walmart for \$7Buy de Ball Mason jars (8 oz., 12 count) from Walmart for \$7.50Buy the Ball Mason jars (16 oz., 12 count) from Walmart for \$6 Kerr As we have said, Mason jars have a ton of uses, from canning homemade goods like jam and jelly to storing wet and dry cooking ingredients. Because of their airtight lid design and heat resistant glass construction, Mason jars are also great for keeping liquids such as homemade soups, sauces and juices. Standard Mason jars might be a little small for this endeavor, however. At the very least, the slightly narrow mouths of most pots can make pouring liquids unnecessarily messy and difficult. In this case, what you need are Mason jars with wide mouths like this one from Kerr, which feature a larger opening that makes it easier to add and remove wet or larger contents (while also making the jars easier to clean by hand), if the Kerr pots their packaging looks eerily similar to that of Ball jars, it's because they're basically the same: Both Ball and Kerr brands are now owned and manufactured by the parent company Jarden. That means the Kerr Mason pots boast all of the tough American quality of their ball counterparts, so you buy with confidence. Like other Ball and Kerr pots, these are also safe for and freezing and are available in different sizes to suit your needs. They're still pretty cheap, too, though slightly less, as the 32 ounce pots come in at about a dollar each. Pros: Made in America, Solid build quality with well-sealing lids, wide mouths make it easier to pour liquid contents clean, replacement lids are readily available, and they are heat and freezer safeCons: The larger ones are slightly more expensive than their normal mouth counterpartsBuy the Kerr wide-mouth Mason jars (8 oz., 12 seconds) from Walmart for \$8Buy the Kerr wide mouth Masons pots (16 oz., 12 count) from Walmart for \$8Buy the Kerr wide-mouth Mason jars (32 oz., 12 count) from Walmart for \$12 Bormioli Traditional Mason jars with screw-top lids are great for canning and storage, but not so convenient for providing quick access to everyday use items you want to grab quickly. For that, you might want to consider something with a captive-lid ball top design like the European made Fido jars from Italian maker Bormioli Rocco, which feature a handy closure that can be opened and closed in seconds with one hand - while still offering an airtight seal that will keep the contents fresh. Purists can claim that these are not technically Mason jars, as they avoid the traditional two-piece lid for a caught hinged closure that seals with a rubber gasket. Granted, they are not wrong, but we have decided to include these anyway as the Bormioli Rocco Fido jars serve much the same purpose as airtight containers for your goodies with a lid design that many will find more convenient. The rubber gaskets seal very well, the lids are heavy and sturdy (just like the glass bodies), and the metal balls are solid and easy to open and close. If there's a downside to the ball top cover design, though, it's that the jars can't really be used for traditional preserves that are going to cook the pots with their contents inside. You'll need Mason jars for that by default. For virtually any other kitchen use, however, the Bormioli Rocco Fido jars are great, and the flip-open lid makes it especially suitable for keeping things like sweets, nuts, and other treats at your fingertips on a table or countertop. They are available in a ton of different sizes, too (marked in metric because they are European), including ones significantly larger than most American Mason jars. They are a bit more expensive because of their design, but not unreasonable so for Italian glass jars that last a lifetime. Pros: Made in Italy, robust glass construction, the ball top design is handy and the rubber gaskets offer a seal, available in a ton of larger sizes, and they look greatCons: They're not nearly as cheap as standard Mason jars, and the ball top design prevents these from being cooked for canning The Bormioli Rocco Fido pots (various sizes available) on Amazon for \$12-\$27 Libbey The De Mason jars haven't changed much (if at all) since the 19th century, but their continued popularity has led makers and users alike to customize these convenient containers for a host of different applications. Perhaps the most popular among these innovations are Mason jars that feature added handles, converting them into safe and convenient drinking glasses. And why not? Mason jars are made of glass, have wide openings and they just look great. The County Fair treated mugs from Libbey have all of the classic charm of Mason pots, but with a simple, sturdy glass handle on the side. On the front, a raised design shows a rooster motif along with letters that reads County Fair Drinking Jar, a nice departure from the standard raised branding you usually see. Like most Libbey glassware, the County Fair Mason pot mugs are made in the United States. They are very well made and, being glass, are safe to drink from (no BPA's or other chemical components that can leech into your drinks, such as with plastic containers). They are also generously sized at 16 grams, although they don't come with lids. Fortunately, however, standard Ball or Kerr Mason pot lids work with these if you want to steal your pot to take your drink with you or keep it fresh in the fridge. At \$26-29 per dozen, the Libbey County Fair drinking pots are more expensive than your run-of-the-mill Mason jars, but that still only comes out at about \$2 a mug - not bad at all for solid American glass drinking utensils. Pros: Made in America from durable glass, a thick and sturdy handle for safe and comfortable drinking from the pot. A nice country-style raised design that sets them apart from other Mason jars, and standard Mason pot lids fit on the threaded openingsCons: They are more expensive than standard Mason jars, and lids must be purchased separatelyby the Libbey County Fair drinking Mason Jar (set of 12) from Walmart for \$26Buy de Libbey County Drinking Mason Jar (set of 12) on Amazon for \$29 Abonneren on our newsletter. Find the best deals on our Coupons page. Disclosure: This message will be addressed to you by the Insider Picks team. We highlight products and services you may find interesting. When you buy them, we get a small portion of the revenue from the sale of our trading partners. We often receive free products from manufacturers for testing. This does not drive our decision on whether or not a product is featured or recommended. 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