

No Toilet Paper? No Problem! 14 Emergency Alternatives

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We are big fans of toilet paper in our house. I am so spoiled that I even have certain brands that I use exclusively on my tender tush. As a prepper, I am compelled to ask, “But what if my toilet paper supply doesn’t last until I am able to purchase more?”

What exactly are my best options when the toilet paper runs out? Flannel squares, bidet, spray bottle, socks, baby wipes, plant leaves, and snow are only a few of the possible options you may be using if you neglect to stock up on toilet paper.

History can be an amazing teacher. Let us explore what our ancestors used before the invention of toilet paper.

Historical Substitutes for Toilet Paper

According to Wikipedia, Joseph Gayetty invented the modern version of toilet paper in the United States in 1857. Just how did people wipe before toilet paper?

The Romans provided a sponge attached to the end of a stick for citizens to use in public toilets. It was returned to a bucket of brine (saltwater) after each use. Have you ever wondered where the saying, “picking up the wrong end of the stick” came from?



Ancient Jewish practice included carrying a small bag filled with pebbles, dry grass, or smooth edges of broken pottery. Vikings used discarded sheep wool. Eskimos used tundra moss in the warm months and handfuls of snow in the winter. Snow!? Doesn’t that just make you want to run to the store and stock up on a bit more toilet paper?

Colonial Americans used corn cobs until newspapers became common. The French invented the bidet for proper cleansing, which is still quite popular.

The wealthy may have used wool, lace, linen or hemp. The poorer population resorted to using their hand when defecating near water sources.

Other recorded options included; rags, wood shavings, leaves, grass, hay, stone, sand, moss, water, snow, maize, ferns, plant husks, fruit skins, sea shells or corn cobs. The various products used were influenced by country, weather or local customs.

The Fragility of Our Toilet Paper Supply

In 1973, there was a great toilet paper shortage caused when the popular evening talk show host, Johnny Carson, made a joke indicating there was an acute toilet paper shortage in the United States. By noon the next day, most stores were completely sold out as 20 million viewers bought every roll they could find.

As it turns out there was no real shortage of toilet paper. This example illustrates just how fragile our supply system can be. Stocking up protects you from whatever fluctuation in supply may occur.

Realistic Replacements for Toilet Paper

The purpose of our research was to get a clear picture of our possible options available to us when the disaster outlasts our stash of toilet paper. We have listed 14 ideas for when life leaves you without toilet paper.

1. Flannel Squares

Reusable toilet paper has become popular in some preparedness circles for long term supply shortages. These 8"x 8" fabric squares are made from cotton flannel.

The soft flannel squares are used in place of toilet paper, then washed, dried, and reused. I recommend using a disinfectant when washing and hanging them to dry in the sun to take advantage of UV disinfection.



Yes, we are accumulating a supply. We recycle used flannel sheets and pajamas into lovely little squares of toilet paper. I have experimented with knit t-shirt fabric, but I didn't like as well. The edges roll up, making laundry a bit more challenging.

2. Bidet



A bidet is an effective replacement for toilet paper. I personally was a bit put off by the thought when originally introduced to the bidet. Jonathan received one as a gift from our son who travels frequently and is a big fan.

Quite frankly, I did not try it until over a year after it was installed on our toilet. I had been sick and my bottom was very sore. I tried it out of desperation, but I learned to love it. It is quite effective at cleansing the posterior.

Toilet paper is only required to pat dry. It would be very easy to dry off with a flannel square or dry washcloth.

Bidets are inexpensive and take only a few minutes to install. I would highly recommend installing a bidet on at least one toilet in your home. It will pay for itself within just a couple of months with the reduced toilet paper consumption. Check the current price on Amazon [here](#).

3. Portable Bidet

Cleansing bottles, or [Peri Bottles](#), are great to take along with you to use when you are away from home. Similar to the bidet, you fill the bottle with water and squeeze the water out to cleanse the backside.

Cleansing bottles are frequently used by women after childbirth when toilet paper is highly uncomfortable to use. They can be purchased on Amazon [here](#).



4. Spray Bottle

It is possible to use a spray bottle of water similar to the way you may use a cleansing bottle. I personally think that the volume of water released by the cleansing bottle is more effective. However, you may need to use whatever options you have available.

5. Washcloths or Rags

Small washcloths or rags may be used to wipe. Inexpensive washcloths may be purchased in bulk and stored as backup toilet paper. Consider purchasing a different color for each member of the family if the thought of sharing is a bit uncomfortable.

6. Holey or Worn Out Socks

Ever wonder what to do with all of those holey socks? You can recycle them to use as alternative toilet paper when disaster strikes. Instead of throwing those old worn out socks in the trash, wash them and place them in containers labeled and ready for use. They may come in quite handy when your toilet paper supply runs out.



You can wash the socks and reuse them, or just dispose of them depending on your circumstances and supply.

7. Baby Wipes

Baby wipes are a good option to replace toilet paper when they are available. Do not flush them down the toilet because they do not break down like toilet paper and they clog pipes and grinder pumps in septic and sewer systems.

8. Mullein Leaves

Common mullein has been referred to as “Cowboy Toilet Paper.” It is a plant that grows wild and is soft with a slightly fuzzy leaf. It works well as long as you have a supply of it wherever you may need to go.

9. Wooly Lamb’s Ear



Wooly Lamb’s Ear is similar to mullein and we have a healthy supply of it growing in the backyard. It grows nicely for 9 months out of the year in our area. The photo was taken at the end of November, and as you can see it is still quite happy and a good backup for my toilet paper supply.

Lamb’s Ear has an incredibly soft, fuzzy, absorbent leaf that is packed with medicinal properties. It makes a great

wound bandage to stop bleeding and prevent infection. Lamb's ear is actually a nice alternative for toilet paper during the growing season.

10. Large Plant or Tree Leaves

Large green plant leaves can be an effective toilet paper alternative. Obviously, you should not use leaves from plants that may cause irritation such as; poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac. Avoid leaves with pokey edges like the Oregon grape, ouch!

11. Newspaper/Catalogs/Paper

Newspapers can be cut or torn into smaller pieces and used as toilet paper. Definitely not a soft alternative, but it will get the job done. Other paper products such as phone books, catalogs, old school assignments, and receipts will also work.

Paper is abrasive so you may want to get it wet before using. This may also reduce the risk of paper cuts to tender areas.

12. Cardboard Toilet Paper Rolls

Stuck with an empty roll? Make the best of it. You may tear strips of cardboard off of the toilet paper roll or just get it wet and use the entire roll. Not a long term solution ... but a thought.

13. Snow



Like those poor Eskimos we discussed above, you may need to resort to using snow to clean your hind parts. This frigid experience may be better than an itchy bum resulting from poor hygiene. Snow would not be my first choice to replace toilet paper.

14. Hand

Yup, this sounds absolutely disgusting to me! To quote our Boy Scout son, *"If in the woods without the goods, be a man and use the hand."*

When you run out of other options, you always have your hand ... and hopefully a water source with soap to clean it afterward.

Best Practices for Washing Reusable Toilet Paper

Whatever your choice for reusable cloth toilet paper, be sure to clean and disinfect the cloths well. Feces is a highly contaminated substance and is quite efficient at spreading disease. The last thing that you want in a disaster scenario is to get sick!

Add a good disinfectant to the wash such as chlorine bleach or vinegar. Be sure to allow at least 30 minutes of exposure time in the water to kill the critters. Check out our post on [calcium hypochlorite](#) to learn how to make a stock solution for disinfection.

If no disinfectant is available, you should hang the reusable toilet paper on a clothesline and expose it to the UV rays of the sun. UV can be a powerful



disinfectant. I would leave the washed cloths on the line for several hours to ensure adequate disinfection takes place.

How Much Toilet Paper Should I Store?

The toilet paper consumption per person varies significantly. **On average you should plan for 100 regular rolls, or 50 double rolls, of toilet paper per person for one year.** Women tend to use more toilet paper than men do.

Jonathan, my engineer husband, wants to make the point that the size of the toilet paper rolls is always changing so this number may not be accurate. He calculates the size of the rolls using square footage. Usage also changes depending on whether the toilet paper is 1-ply or 2-ply.



We suggest that you monitor toilet consumption for your family for 3 months. That will give you a baseline to determine how much you need for your supply. We personally recommend at least storing enough for one year.

Considering the alternatives discussed above will hopefully help you to determine how much you should stash away and motivate you to get it done.

What is The Best Way to Store Toilet Paper?

Toilet paper is not overly sensitive to heat, but moisture can quickly make it moldy. **Store toilet paper in a dry location away from direct sun. Toilet paper will store indefinitely in a cool, dark, dry location.**

Toilet paper is a bit bulky and takes up quite a bit of space. It is light which means it may be safely stored high on shelves.

Check out this shelf that Jonathan built over the door of our master bathroom toilet closet. It is a 12-inch shelf and cost less than \$20 to build. It stores enough toilet paper and feminine products for 4 people for 1 year.



Think about where you might be able to stash toilet paper. Can you put an extra shelf in the top of a closet? Top shelves in the garage? Under a bed?

Get creative so you don't have to experiment with the options we discussed in this article.

Conclusion



It is estimated that 70 percent of the world population does not use toilet paper. Unless you want to join this crowd or want to experiment with other options, now is the perfect time to stock-up. Once disaster strikes, it is too late. If you show up begging for a square at our door, we will share the cheap stuff we bought on sale by mistake. Sorry ... we draw the line at toilet paper!

Remember, the average American uses 100 single rolls of toilet paper a year. You decide how long you would like the luxury of toilet paper, and stock up accordingly. After writing this post, I am grateful for my working bidet and I have a renewed burning

desire run out and stock up on toilet paper!

Thanks for being part of the solution!

[embedyt] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Axmg3Hv3Ak>[/embedyt]