

105 of 172 DOCUMENTS

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Food Security Device

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ENGLISH-ABST:

A container for preserving food and locking food. Containers, particularly food containers, are sized to be similar to conventional plate sizes and glass sizes. Users can simply place a plate of unfinished food or an unfinished drink in the present invention for storage. A locking mechanism prevents unauthorized access to the food, i.e. by hungry roommates. The present invention thereby solves a long-standing problem and makes storage in a community refrigerator not only possible but practical.

NO-OF-CLAIMS: 13

NO-DRWNG-PP: 3

PARENT-PAT-INFO:

[0001] This application is a utility application claiming priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/521,574 filed on May 26, 2004.

SUMMARY:**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

[0002] The present invention relates to food containers of different types likes beverage cans, food dish and multipurpose bowls etc. It particularly relates to providing locking mechanisms to avoid food being stolen when kept in a common place both from humans and animals. It also helps in preserving the freshness and taste of food kept in them.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Many individuals live alone, an in such cases, any food that is placed in a refrigerator or cabinet by an individual will remain in storage until the food is disturbed by the individual. For example, if an individual living alone has left over pizza, then the pizza will remain undisturbed if the pizza is left out on a counter or stored in a refrigerator. Similarly, if a drink is not finished, and the cup is merely placed back in a refrigerator, the drink will not be consumed by anyone but the individual living alone--simply because there is no other individual in the living arrangement.

[0004] Thus, food is relatively secure and remains undisturbed, but for the individual accessing food. However, oftentimes living arrangements exist where multiple individuals share a common refrigerator and/or eating space. For example, a typical family shares a kitchen, and arrangements whereby roommates share eating areas are common with several friends or college students living together. In such circumstances, the possibility often presents itself for one individual to have left over or partially consumed food, and another individual will simply finish the food. While all individuals are generally altruistic, food tends to be personal, and some individuals even view it as a reward. It then follows that if a first individual leaves food to be eaten later, and then a second individual consumes the food to be eaten later, the first individual will be disappointed, annoyed, angered, or possibly all of the above. Unfortunately, no matter the first individual's reaction, the first individual will have been deprived of food that was expected and desired.

[0005] Thus, there is a need for a food containment device that prevents access from unwanted food predators. There is a need for a food containment device that is fully functional in storing the food, while at the same time offering the added security of locking. Moreover, there is a need for such a locking food container to not merely hold itself closed by locking, but such a locking food container needs to lock so that only the individual originally locking the food container has the ability to open it.

[0006] The following relevant art has dealt with the field of food storage and locking etc. in general, but has not provided solutions for individual containers used by people in their workplace, home, and so forth.

[0007] U.S. Pat. No. 5,118,032 issued to Geho on Jun. 2, 1992, refers to a container for a flat food product is formed from a one-piece blank to provide a multisided container having a front panel, first and second opposing side panels, third and fourth opposing side panels, first and second perforated portions interconnecting said first and third opposing side panels and said second and fourth opposing side panels, respectively, a rear panel, and a top. The six-sided design provides less air space in the container, thus contributing to the maintenance of the temperature of the food product contained therein. Unlike the present invention, Geho's device does not prevent unauthorized users from accessing the food held therein.

[0008] Japanese Patent Number 11342946 published on Dec. 14, 1999, invented by Tatsuo refers to providing a

food packaging container wherein an entire lid including a periphery is formed to be stackable and stability of fitting of the lid is excellent due to an easy-to-operate locking structure. The food packaging container made of a synthetic resin comprises a flange-like container body 1 whose opening rim at an upper end of a peripheral side wall extends outward and a lid 2 which can be put thereover. The entire lid 2 including a periphery to be mounted on the opening rim of the container body 1 is formed to be stackable, while locking parts 24 to be fitted in and locked with notch engaging parts 14 provided at corresponding portions of the opening rim of the container body 1 are formed at a plurality of portions. Unlike the present invention, Tatsuo's device does not prevent unauthorized users from accessing the food held therein.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 5,012,971 issued on May 7, 1991, to Cozzi et al. refers to a food container and method wherein a compartmented container that is especially suitable for containing food is provided. The container or package in one embodiment comprises a first or bottom compartment and a second or top compartment that is hinged to the first compartment. The two compartments being especially adapted for separately containing the contents of the two compartments. The container further includes a latch mechanism composed of a locking latch extending from one compartment and a locking aperture in the other compartment into which the latch can be inserted when the container is in the closed position. A removable platform forms part of the container and is positionable over the open portion of one of the compartments. Unlike the present invention, Cozzi et al.'s device does not prevent unauthorized users from accessing the food held therein.

[0010] U.S. Pat. No. 5,052,369 issued to Johnson on Oct. 1, 1991, refers to a heat retaining food container and improved heat retaining foodservice system including a heat retaining food cover (10), food container (310) and underbase (210), each including a heat storage system comprised of a sealed chamber therewithin, said chamber containing a layer of non-metallic heat storing material, such as micro crystalline wax enclosed by a layer of film for keeping food warmer for longer periods of time. Preferably, the food cover, container and underbase are each constructed of high-temperature stable polymeric material which is transparent to microwave radiation to facilitate heating of the heat storing material by use of a microwave oven, as well as by a conventional convection or radiant heat type oven. Unlike the present invention, Johnson's device does not prevent unauthorized users from accessing the food held therein.

[0011] U.S. Pat. No. 5,204,130 issued to McDevitt et al. on Apr. 20, 1993, refers to a reclosable container for sliced food products; the reclosable container for sliced food products having a one-piece container body and integral hinge and lid. The front wall of the container body is provided with a forward protrusion to facilitate removal of a desired number of slices. A locking mechanism enables the lid to be locked in closed position, and provides an audible indication when the lid is locked. The container is reusable and may be made from a polymeric material having sufficient transparency to enable the consumer to count slices viewed through the front wall as they are being removed. Unlike the present invention, McDevitt et al.'s device does not prevent unauthorized users from accessing the food held therein.

[0012] The relevant art does not attend to the problem of theft of food by others in general from food containers, particularly at a user's work spot, shared home living arrangements, etc.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The present invention relates to containers, particularly food containers, having provisions for preserving food and beverages etc and having lock mechanisms for preventing their unauthorized access by others than the specified user. It thereby solves a long-standing problem.

DRWDESC:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] FIG. 1 is an environmental view of a first embodiment of the present invention, wherein the top is screwed on to the bottom or snapped shut. This embodiment is intended for beverages, and a provision is made on the container for attaching a locking means.

[0015] FIG. 2 is an environmental view of a second embodiment of the present invention showing a compartmentalized bottom container with a top. This embodiment is intended for a food dish holding portions of food from a dish, and a provision is made on the container for attaching a locking means.

DETDESC:

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016] The present invention is a locking container system for preserving food, not only from spoilage, but from other individuals desiring to gain access to and eat stored food.

[0017] While a container that is part of the present can be of varied shapes and sizes, it is preferred that the present invention be slightly larger than conventionally sized glasses and plates, such that a conventional glass or plate could be placed inside the container of the present invention. A user could either place food in the container of the present invention, or the user could merely put the a plate or glass full of food inside the container of the present invention.

[0018] Further, the present invention can be in the shape of beverage cans to provide security and storage for beverage cans. Additionally, the present invention may be in the shape of variously shaped dishes. The present invention may be optionally in the form of rectangle shape for multi usage if several small plates are to be stored together. The present invention can be in form of a large bowl shape for accommodation of multiple bowls and/or plates.

[0019] The present invention can be made either of metal, plastic, or any other conventional material used for storage. The material can be microwavable plastic for ease in reheating stored food and/or beverages.

[0020] As aforementioned, the present invention is variously sized to receive the conventional shapes of dishes, glasses, and other eating surfaces.

[0021] In one preferred embodiment of the invention, the container can receive the dinner plates in particular, and hold them securely.

[0022] The container of the present invention can be made such that food can be transferred to it, the container being shaped to suit the needs of the user in that it can be of varied shapes to hold nearly any type of edible item and/or the food holder holding the edible item.

[0023] Alternatively, as aforementioned, the present invention can be made in such size and shape to hold, for example, the beverage can, food dish, or dish plate, etc. so that without transferring the food to the container of the present invention, the dish plate, for example, can be inserted in to the container, and the locking means used for locking the container.

[0024] The locking means of the present invention can be a combination lock means or key lock means, or any conventional locking system that has security. The locks of the present invention are non-specific in that any conventional locks will work. The preferred embodiment provides loops on the lid of the present invention as well as on the actual container of the present invention. A conventional lock goes through both loops so that the lid and container

cannot separate unless the lock is removed. It is contemplated that conventional padlocks abound and are relatively inexpensive, and thus, the loops of the lid and container of the preferred embodiment of the present invention cater to such.

[0025] In practice, the user stores food in the container directly or inserts the dish or plate containing the food or beverage directly into the container. Using the locking means the container is locked. The user thus secures its food from being pilfered or stolen by others. Moreover by selecting the appropriate material for the container, the freshness of food is also maintained. For example, the container of the present invention could be made of an insulating material to ensure that food contained within is kept hot or cold. Alternatively, the container of the present invention could be made porous to allow the food to receive fresh air.

[0026] As said above, in a preferred embodiment, the containers are sized rather oversized to receive the beverage can or food dish, etc. into them to avoid transferring the food into the containers.

[0027] In FIG. 1, the container comprises the bottom body (1), the lid (2). Both the body (1) and the lid (2) have first and second loops (3, 4), respectively, for attaching a conventional locking means (20). This embodiment is dimensioned in the shape of a cylinder to hold a conventional beverage or beverage container. For example, this embodiment could be sized to hold a conventional 20 ounce beverage container, or receive 20 ounces of a beverage. The embodiment would then be locked by opening conventional locking means (20) and placing conventional locking means (20) through first and second loops (3, 4).

[0028] FIG. 2 shows the present invention in the shape of a compartmentalized container having three compartments. In a preferred embodiment, the present invention has three compartments, although the number of compartments can be any number as desired by the user. As shown in FIG. 2, the container of the present invention has lower portion (5), upper portion (6) and the first and second hoops means (7, 8) respectively, for attaching conventional locking means (20)--conventional locking means (20) having been shown in FIG. 1.

[0029] It is to be understood that other shapes and sizes, other than those shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, are contemplated for the present invention, and various types of conventional locking means can be employed beyond that which has been illustrated in FIG. 1.

[0030] Although illustrative embodiments of the present invention have been described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be affected therein by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention described in the following claims.

ENGLISH-CLAIMS:

Return to Top of Patent

1. A food containing system, comprising: a top; a bottom, in communication with said top; and a locking means, in communication with top and said bottom.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein said top has a loop.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom has a loop.
4. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom is configured to hold a conventional glass.
5. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom is configured to hold a conventional dish.
6. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom is configured to receive food.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom is configured to receive a liquid.
8. The system of claim 1, wherein locking means is a combination lock.
9. The system of claim 1, wherein said top and said bottom are microwavable.
10. The system of claim 1, wherein said locking means is a key lock.
11. The system of claim 1, wherein said bottom has at least two compartments.
12. The system of claim 1, wherein said top and said bottom are configured to hold a beverage container snugly.
13. The system of claim 1, wherein said top and said bottom are configured to hold a plate snugly.

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