

Introduction

Portable storage containers, not to be confused with storage trailers, which have wheels, are an ideal option for extra storage space. If you find there's no room left to squeeze out of your warehouse or storage areas, portable storage containers can provide immediate additional space to store anything from company records to excess inventory.

Durable and waterproof, storage containers can be used year-round in any type of weather without fear of rust or leaks. What's more, they are far less expensive than new construction, and can be delivered in a matter of days.

Use this BuyerZone Steel Storage Containers Buyer's Guide to learn the essentials, including:

- What storage container options are available
- What to look for in a vendor
- How to decide between buying, leasing, and renting
- How much you can expect to pay

Once you determine what your needs are, we can provide you with free custom quotes from multiple portable storage container suppliers in your area.

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Pricing guidelines

Actual costs for a storage container will vary significantly based on a myriad of factors. Here are some very rough estimates – we'll go into more detail in **Pricing** on page 6.

Storage container type	Notes	Estimated cost
20' container (new)	Customization costs more	\$2,800 to \$3,400
40' container (new)	More space for similar 20' price	\$4,900 to \$6,000
Used container - 20' or 40'	Refurbished to appear like new	\$1,900 to \$3,300

Container rentals	Average lease term: 18 to 24 mo.	\$75 to \$150/mo.
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Storage container basics

Storage containers come in a variety of sizes. Most are usually 8' wide and 8'6" high, and commonly feature lengths of 20 and 40 feet (1,170 cubic feet and 3,340 cubic feet).

Most businesses choose 20' containers since they provide easier access to items in the back. 40' models provide almost three times as much storage space, but may require additional doors on the back or side to take advantage of the larger space. For additional clearance, "high cubes" feature internal heights of 9'6".

Some vendors may offer containers in other lengths, such as lengths as small as 6' or as large as 54', but these specialty sizes can be hard to find, and you should be clear on the purposes for that specially-sized storage container. Specialty container heights of 45', 48', and 53' are available for domestic use only, and cannot be shipped overseas.

Storage containers are easily stackable which can be a space saver. Forklifts can easily hoist two 20' units off delivery trucks and on top of each other.



Container design

Storage containers are constructed with 12- or 14-gauge corrugated steel sides, doors, and roofs. The floors are made from marine-grade plywood that is just over one inch thick and can withstand 16,000 pounds of pressure per 100 square feet. Manufacturers weld the containers together using an elastic sealing compound to ensure they are air and water tight. This heavy-duty construction meets ISO construction standards and most models are both weather resistant and fireproof.

To protect contents from theft or vandalism, swing-out doors at either end of the container feature galvanized interior locking bars, similar to bank vaults. In addition, cam rods and padlock hasps secure the unit to protect the contents after hours.

While most commercial storage containers feature steel construction, other types of portable storage solutions are made from wood and fiberglass. While suitable for personal use, they may not be sturdy or reliable enough for regular business use.

Installation & zoning

Average 20 foot containers weigh 5,000 pounds and 40 foot containers weigh 10,000 pounds. Both are delivered by flat tilt-bed trucks or trailers. While they can rest on any surface from rough gravel roads to smooth concrete, it's required that you reserve a 75 foot by 100 foot area of land that is both level and firm. The level ground prevents the container from tilting or tipping, and the large area provides the truck with plenty of clearance to move in and out of the unit.

Be careful if you plan to use storage containers for long periods of time. Certain cities view storage containers as "dumpsters" and may require a special permit or official approval for long-term use. If you plan to keep storage containers on your premises for several months or longer, check with your local government to avoid violating any zoning laws.

Zoning and permits vary by city and/or county, and change frequently. If you are buying a storage container, you must do your due diligence to find out the current law. If you are renting, the rental company should be up to speed on the newest regulations.

Container uses by industry

Different businesses have various needs for storage containers. Here is just a sample of how certain industries use them:

Industry	Portable Storage Container Uses
Department stores, pharmacies, supermarkets, hospitality, food service	Excess inventory, paper records storage, seasonal and holiday needs
Construction, landscapers, , home improvement	Equipment, machinery, supplies, temporary office space
Residents, property owners	Tool shed, household goods storage, home furnishings, non-perishable food supplies
Truckers, utility companies, financial institutions, insurance companies, film production	Document storage, raw materials
Medical facilities, military, government agencies, Native American reservations, academic institutions	Disaster preparation supplies, temporary bunks/shelters, security offices, athletic equipment storage

Optional add-ons

Some vendors may offer some of the following options to increase your container's functionality:

- **Paint:** New or "one trip" storage containers come in neutral factory colors like beige or gray. Used containers come in a rainbow of bright colors. If the container is going to be in a highly visible location, you may want to have it painted in custom colors or even with your corporate logos.
- **Lockbox:** Fireproof steel strongboxes provide increased protection for the container's contents.
- **Alarm system:** For additional security, a monitored alarm system can alert authorities to a potential break-in.
- **Shelving:** Adjustable shelves help you organize your contents.
- **Man doors (side doors):** These additional doors, built on the side of the container to allow people to enter at the middle of the unit (instead of just the end), are helpful for longer units. They can also provide access

between two adjacent containers.

- **Ramps:** Angled foldable walkways allow you to easily wheel hand carts into the unit. To avoid blocking the door, do not prop the ramp directly against the container.
- **Ventilation:** Wind turbine and louver vents allow air flow into the container to reduce humidity.
- **Partitions:** Separate the storage container into sections to create compartments for different uses (example: storage in one part, office space in the other.)
- **Additional insulation:** Protects your belongings in harsh weather conditions and contains heat and cool air year-round.
- **HVAC:** Provides heating, ventilation and/or cooling to regulate temperature.
- **Refrigeration:** Electronically refrigerated containers (known as “reefers”) can store perishable items.

Although some businesses use storage containers as office space, complete with electricity, plumbing, and Internet access, they're not the best choice for long-term use. Unless you only need the office space for a few weeks, you're probably better off with an office trailer.

Choosing a vendor

The portable storage container industry consists of both large and small companies that resell units from wholesalers, leasing companies, and industry associations. The vendors may deal exclusively in storage containers or offer them alongside other purchases such as office trailers or prefabricated construction.

While it doesn't matter what size vendor you work with, there are certain attributes to look for before making a purchase.

The most important point to consider is **proximity**. Delivery charges are based on distance, and it's the most competitive aspect of the industry. It's recommended to select a vendor as close as possible to your location, as shipping prices can quickly become prohibitive.

Working with a local vendor also offers an optimal opportunity to **check out the vendor's inventory in person**. By taking a tour of the facilities, you get a better feel for how they work than you would by ordering through a catalog or over the phone.

Ask questions to learn how knowledgeable your vendor is about the industry. If they've been in business for several years, business longevity is usually indicative of great customer service.

If you need help selecting from several vendors, you can narrow the decision process by asking each vendor for a list of references. Try to request references in businesses similar to yours to find out how the vendors addressed their storage needs. Be sure to ask such questions as:

- Did you have budget concerns that the vendor helped you with?
- Did you require any add-ons such as ramps, shelves, or a lockbox?
- What was the condition of the container you received?



- How much additional cleaning/prep did you need to do to make it ready?
- Did you receive any unexpected charges during the billing process?
- How long did it take to get your container?
- If you had any problems, was the vendor quick to address them?
- Would you work with this vendor again?

Pricing

When you're ready to get a portable storage container, you have three options:

1. **Purchase:** If you will use the container for years and can afford it, buying is usually the best option. Plus, if you no longer need them, storage containers depreciate slowly so you can resell them without losing much value.
2. **Rent:** This is the most affordable option for a few days or weeks at a time. Renting allows you to deduct the fees from your taxes, but can get expensive if you keep the unit longer than expected.
3. **Lease to own:** A good choice when you'll need the container long-term but don't have the cash up front. It allows you to spread costs over a period of time and then purchase the container with a final nominal payment. However, you'll have paid considerably more than the purchase price because of the interest.

Before you purchase containers, consider how quickly you need them. Some vendors may offer same-day delivery on containers they have in stock. More often, they'll deliver your container in one to three days. Keep in mind that adding features will take longer – and cost more.



Transport fees

Shipping costs will depend on distance and total weight and can add considerably to your total expenses. Expect to pay between \$80 and \$500 for delivery in town, taking into account traffic. Delivery costs hike up quickly depending on the distance, especially if you are in the Mountain Time Zone. Besides the west and east coast rail lines, Dallas and Denver are the only mid-west outlets. Vendors may require a minimum shipping fee regardless of distance, and may have a maximum of 250 miles.

New/One-trip containers

New containers are more accurately referred to as “one trip” containers. This is because they make one trip across the ocean before being sold. You can find a basic new/one-trip 20' storage container from \$2,800 to \$3,400. The 40' storage containers run about \$4,900 to \$6,000; 40' high cube containers are priced from \$5,000 to \$6,200.

If you need to buy two or more containers, many vendors may knock a few dollars off the price or lower your transport costs. Vendors charge an hourly rate of \$50 to \$150 for customizing your container, plus the cost of materials. You could pay hundreds of dollars for basic add-ons like shelving or ramps, up to thousands of dollars to convert containers into office space.

Used containers

While new storage containers can cost several thousand dollars, the pricing is more palatable for refurbished containers. Vendors buy pre-owned units, fix them up, replace any broken parts, ensure they're water tight, and may apply a fresh coat of paint. Some vendors abstain from painting since some customers want custom paint colors. The refurbished containers look better, although paint does not cover up dents, and you pay about 30% to 50% less than you would for a new/one trip container.

The price for a 20' used container ranges from \$1,900-\$2,400; 40' used containers cost \$2,600-\$3,300, and 40' High Cube used containers will set you back \$2,700-\$3,400. Lower end units might include "as is" containers with few add-ons and no guarantees against water or fire damage.

At the high end, the containers are fully reconditioned and feature all the functionality of a new/one-trip model. The higher price may include the vendor's cost of acquisition, trucking expenses, and repair and sealant costs.

Leasing and rentals

Short-term rentals are far more common than leasing because most customers expect to use their containers for 1-6 months. Rentals cost \$3 to \$8 per day, and the length terms are flexible. Rental agreements usually require one month minimum, with monthly billing after the first month. Most companies will pro-rate the last month.

Leasing may be beneficial if you need several containers for a long period of time. The average lease runs for 24 months or more. Monthly payments range from \$75 to \$150 depending on the condition and age of the container. When leasing, many vendors offer lower monthly rates for longer lease periods. Whether leasing or renting, the customer is responsible for delivery and pickup charges.

Additional tips

- **You get what you pay for.** Although storage containers can get expensive, don't skimp on quality just to save a few dollars. You may be able to buy an "as is" model for a few hundred dollars, but the container will have rust, sealant cracks, dents, and missing pieces of the floor, that can damage your contents. The additional money you pay for a quality container is a small price to pay to avoid problems later on.
- **Born on dates.** Storage containers are numbered according to shipping standards which have a prefix (4 letters), the container number (6 digits), and a check digit (a number inside a box.) You'll find this container number on each side of the container, on two locations on the roof, and inside the door. The steel plate on the container has the manufacturer date on it, aka the "born on" date.
- **Space considerations.** For a 20' storage container, you need at least 75 feet of clearance for delivery, installation, and to maneuver in and out of the container. You need at least 100 feet of clearance for 40' units. The ground must be level, relatively flat, and firm. Hills and/or mucky mud could cause the truck to get stuck, and the customer would be responsible for the tow.
- **Safety first.** Drivers typically won't deliver to areas where they have concerns for their own safety, or if they feel they may inadvertently cause property damage they would be responsible for. To prevent a wasted trip, customers should send a photo of the space and a photo of the access (such as the turn-off and the driveway) to the space. The driver and vendor can then determine if it's appropriate and safe access for the storage container to be delivered.

- **Learn more about containers.** For additional information about the storage container industry and to research best practices, check out industry association web sites like the National Portable Storage Association - <http://www.npsa-us.org>.