

Equipment Review Plastic Wrap

Our tests showed that wraps either cling or keep food fresh—not both. BY MEREDITH BUTCHER

PLASTIC WRAP IS ESSENTIAL for storing, freezing, and keeping food fresh, but using it can drive you crazy: The roll rips and wraps around itself; the plastic clings to itself more than the dish or won't stick at all; the box falls apart, letting the roll drop out; the sharp metal teeth slice more than the plastic—or merely shred it; and most important, it doesn't keep food from spoiling quickly. Has any brand overcome these failings?

TUG OF WAR First, we measured strength by pulling foot-long pieces of wrap in a series of sharp, short tugs until they tore or lost their shape. Two brands shone, Stretch-Tite and Freeze-Tite, because they were almost impossible to destroy.

STICKY SITUATION To test the ability of the wraps to cling, we placed 8 ounces of grapes in plastic, metal, and glass bowls and covered each bowl with one sheet of wrap. With a few shakes of an inverted bowl, we instantly could see which wraps had the most cling—and which let the grapes fly out. All brands performed well on glass bowls. On metal, some brands failed in as few as three shakes, spilling grapes all over the counter. Others held their grip through all 10 shakes. Plastic bowls presented the biggest challenge, and only a few brands could hold on for even a few shakes. Just one wrap, Glad Press'n Seal, stuck through every shake on every surface, although Stretch-Tite came close.

FRESH TEST The most important test measured the ability of the wraps to keep foods fresh. We were looking for an impermeable wrap that prevented air and moisture from passing through. Since it was difficult to quantify "freshness" with a real-world food test (Check for mold? Off smells?), we took a scientific approach. We purchased a bottle of Indicating Drierite (calcium sulfate), an absorbent used in packaging, whose small purple-blue pebbles turn bright pink when exposed to moisture. We put 1 tablespoon of Drierite in small glass bowls covered tightly with a sheet of each wrap. After two days, the Drierite in bowls covered with Stretch-Tite, Freeze-Tite, and Reynolds Seal-Tight had turned bright pink, indicating that the wrap had allowed moisture in, which means food would spoil faster. The Drierite under the other wraps lasted more than three weeks without a color change, indicating that these wraps were impermeable. This shocked us: A leading

RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA	KEY	Good ★★★	Fair ★★	Poor ★
GLAD Cling Wrap Clear Plastic Price: \$1.20 per 100 square feet Material: Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)	Impermeability ★★★ Strength and Cling ★★ Packaging ★★	Comments: This wrap aced the impermeability test. Its box featured well-placed, sharp teeth that easily tore the plastic, and "Glad Grab" (a 1-inch adhesive pad to hold the cut end of the wrap). It clung slightly less well than PVC-based wraps, but it got the job done and offered good value.			
RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS	CRITERIA	TESTERS' NOTES			
STRETCH-TITE Plastic Food Wrap Price: \$1.72 per 100 square feet Material: Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)	Impermeability ★★★ Strength and Cling ★★★ Packaging ★★★	Comments: This wrap had the most cling and was by far the toughest of the lineup. Unfortunately, it was one of the first wraps to turn pink in the Drierite test, meaning it allowed moisture to penetrate. And without any adhesive on the box, the plastic wrap kept rolling back on itself.			
SARAN Premium Wrap Price: \$2.99 per 100 square feet Material: Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)	Impermeability ★★★ Strength and Cling ★★ Packaging ★★	Comments: Its easy "tear and restart" strip earned this wrap points, as did its ability to keep moisture out. However, it bombed the cling test, dropping the grapes after just three shakes of a metal bowl. Plus, it wouldn't stick to plastic bowls.			
GLAD Press'n Seal Plastic Wrap Price: \$4.56 per 100 square feet Material: Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE) with Griptex	Impermeability ★★★ Strength and Cling ★★★ Packaging ★	Comments: This wrap will stick to anything, and it performed well in our moisture test, but its high price and inability to restick once the initial seal is broken pushed its rating down. Also, the frosted film makes it impossible to see into the bowl.			
SARAN Cling Plus Wrap Price: \$1 per 100 square feet Material: Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)	Impermeability ★★★ Strength and Cling ★★ Packaging ★	Comments: It passed the moisture-proof test and offered the best value of the lineup. But the box design, with sharp teeth along the bottom, sent testers running for Band-Aids. Also, while the wrap clung tightly to glass in the grape-shaking tests, the seal broke after six shakes of a metal bowl and just three in a plastic one.			
NOT RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA	TESTERS' NOTES			
FREEZE-TITE Freezer Wrap Price: \$4.01 per 100 square feet Material: Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)	Impermeability ★ Strength and Cling ★★★ Packaging ★	Comments: This brand offered the widest sheets (14 1/8 inches versus the standard 12 inches) of the wraps we tested, but it failed our moisture-proof test, in the kitchen, that would mean freezer burn. Also, this wrap often tore as it was dispensed, and its price was among the highest per square foot.			
REYNOLDS Seal-Tight Plastic Wrap Price: \$2 per 100 square feet Material: Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)	Impermeability ★ Strength and Cling ★★ Packaging ★	Comments: This wrap frustrated testers within seconds. A "quick release" tab tore off, causing the wrap to stick to itself before testing even began. While its sticking performance was fine, it allowed moisture to penetrate within two days (compared to three weeks for other wraps).			

contender, Stretch-Tite, had failed. In disbelief, we repeated the test, with the same results. What had happened?

MATERIAL DIFFERENCES As it turns out, plastic wrap can be made from two distinctly different substances. The earliest plastic wrap was made of PVC (polyvinyl chloride), a highly clinging material. But plasticizers and chlorine in these wraps held a risk of food contamination, so manufacturers came up with safer substitutes. Some stuck with a new food-safe version of PVC; others switched to low-density polyethylene (LDPE). The main difference? PVC clings but is not impermeable; LDPE is impermeable but has far less cling. Our research revealed that Stretch-Tite, Freeze-Tite, and Reynolds are all made of clingy PVC, and the rest of the lineup is less-clingy LDPE. Another style of LPDE wrap, marketed as "press'n seal" by Glad, is made with an edible dimpled adhesive. We don't like this style. While it works well initially, once the seal is broken (say, if you were taking a helping of potato salad out of a bowl), this wrap won't reattach.

GOOD DESIGN Our testers much preferred packaging with metal teeth on the top edge, inside the cover, to those with teeth on the exposed bottom of the box, which were more apt to snag testers' clothing and skin. We liked boxes with a sticky pad on the front to hold the sheet, keeping it from rolling back on itself and getting tangled and crumpled. We've yet to find perfect packaging.

WRAPPING UP Clingy PVC wraps such as Reynolds, Stretch-Tite, and Freeze-Tite are preferable if you are transporting food or are worried about spills and leaks, but to keep foods fresh longer, select plastic wraps made from LDPE and reach for a box of our all-around winner, Glad Cling Wrap.