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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: STORING PLASTIC CONTAINERS AND LIDS

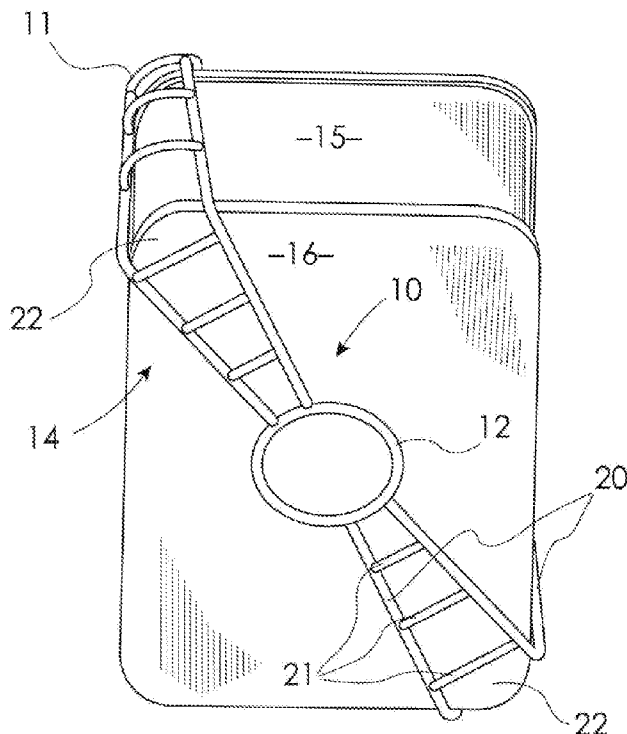


FIG. 4

(57) Abstract: This invention provides a storage aid (10) for holding a container lid (27) or a stack of container lids against the underside of a rectangular storage container (15). This is achieved by providing opposed corner connectors (11) which engage about the diagonally opposite corners at the open end of the container (15) interconnected by an elastic part (14) which can be stretched and located about the base corners (24) below the corner connections (15) so as to maintain the elastic part (14) extending substantially diagonally across the container beneath the base thereof for supporting a container lid (27) or lids stored against the base (16) of the container (15).



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— with international search report (Art. 21(3))

— before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))

Storing plastic containers and lids

Technical Field

This invention relates to methods of and apparatus for convenient storage of plastic containers, particularly rectangular shaped containers, but also round bowls and the like and their lids such as in kitchen drawers, cupboards or shelves.

Background Art

Plastic containers are widely used in most kitchens, both domestic and commercial, for the convenient storage of food as closure of a container by its lid creates a sealed confinement for the food therein which can be stored and handled without fear of the contents being spilled or spoiled. Accordingly many kitchens have a wide array of containers of different shapes and sizes as well as containers for special purposes stored for use when required.

A frequent problem which is encountered is finding the right lid for a selected container and searching for an elusive lid which is known to be stored can cause time delays and can create frustrations, especially in a busy kitchen. Some of these containers are round but many are rectangular in varying sizes and configurations.

This invention in one aspect aims to provide a method of and apparatus for storing rectangular containers and their lids in a compact convenient configuration and whereby selection of a container and its matching lid may be more readily achieved.

This invention also aims to provide a method of and apparatus for storing round containers and their lids in a compact convenient configuration.

Summary of Invention

With the foregoing in view this invention in one aspect resides in a storage aide for holding a container lid or a stack of container lids against the underside of a rectangular storage container including:-

termination means engageable with the open end of the container whereby corner connections are provided at diagonally opposite corners of the container;

an elastically stretchable support assembly extending between the corner connections and including location means which locate about the opposed base corners of the container beneath said diagonally opposite corners so as to maintain the intermediate portion of the elastically stretchable support assembly extending substantially diagonally across the container beneath the base thereof.

The termination means may include an adjustable strap or frame or an elastic ring which may extend closely around an upper end of the container above a lid flange or the like protrusion adjacent the open end to provide the corner connections.

Preferably the termination means is a pair of opposed terminations each of which may be operatively retained at a respective opposing open corner of the open topped container to form the corner connections. Each termination may be a terminating hook which may be hooked into the open corner of a container or each termination may be a latch, clip or other termination adapted to engage in a complementary corner formation in a container or each termination means may engage with a formation provided on the container for attaching the lid thereto.

In a preferred form each terminating hook is formed so as to positively locate over an open corner of the container. Preferably the terminating hook is shaped to fit closely into the corner so as to maximise the internal diagonal dimension therebetween for accommodating a similar size or relatively large container therebetween substantially within the container supporting the storage aide.

The elastically stretchable support assembly may be formed of discrete components all or some of which may be elastically stretchable by being formed of elastically stretchable material or be telescopically expandable and biased to a contracted attitude by spring means or the elastically stretchable support assembly may be

formed in one-piece by moulding or fabrication from an elastically stretchable material such as rubber or other elastomeric material or the like and if desired different grades or thicknesses of material may be utilised at different portions thereof to provide the desired characteristic of being able to be used with a range of sizes of rectangular kitchen containers. If desired the elastically stretchable support assembly could be formed of metal such as by utilising thin coil springs.

In a preferred form the intermediate portion of the elastically stretchable support assembly which extends substantially diagonally across the container beneath the base includes a substantially centrally disposed ring or other lateral protrusions which is relatively stiff so as to provide a retaining force toward the container base to the stored lids offset from the medial line between said opposed corners. As container lids will have different stiffness characteristics and be of various sizes it is considered that this provision will assist in keeping most forms and sizes of lids secured beneath the container on which the aide is supported.

The location means serves not only to position the intermediate portion but also to resist its movement away from its substantially diagonally extending position beneath the container base when lids are forced into their stored position or retained lids are removed. The location means may be respective panels which deform over the respective opposed base corners of a container. Preferably however the location means provides respective locating apertures which locate about the base corners of the container and suitably several locating apertures are provided in series adjacent each end thereof such that the storage aide may be used on shallow containers where locating apertures closer to the termination means may engage over the base corners or on deep containers where apertures further distant from the termination means may engage over the base corners. Suitably the locating apertures are defined by resilient portions of the elastically stretchable support assembly whereby in use, they may stretch to substantially conform to the shape of the container.

While the storage aide may be used on round bowls and containers, the cornerless and often tapering lower portion of the container may cause difficulty in use and thus for round containers there is provided a supporting rack assembly having an elevated bowl support on or in which a large round bowl may be supported with room underneath for the rack assembly to support smaller diameter lids and a side rack on which lids may be supported beside the elevated bowl support. Smaller containers of any configuration may be housed in the supported large round bowl. The supporting rack may extend to one or both sides of the elevated bowl support and may be extendable so that its capacity to support lids beside the elevated bowl support may be adjusted.

In another aspect this invention resides in a method of storing a rectangular kitchen container and a selected lid, including:-

- providing a storage aide as variously defined above;

- connecting the elastically stretchable support assembly to an open topped container by operatively engaging the termination means with the open top of the container and arranging the medial portion of the support assembly beneath the base of the container, and

- inserting the selected lid between the medial portion and the base of the container such that the container with the retained lid may be stowed as a unit in a storage area.

A plurality of lids may be so retained beneath a container and the smaller containers which match the smaller retained lids may be accommodated within the first mentioned container for compact storage with their matching lids.

Accordingly a method according to this invention includes selecting the largest of a number of containers to be stored as a compact unit whereby the smaller containers may be stored therein, connecting the elastically stretchable support assembly to the largest container by operatively engaging the termination means with the open top

of the largest container and arranging the medial portion of the support assembly beneath the base of the largest container and extending substantially diagonally thereacross, and

inserting the selected lids between the medial portion and the base of the largest container such that the container with the lids retained therebeneath and the smaller containers accommodated therein may be stowed as a unit in a storage area.

Brief Description of Drawings

In order that this invention may be more readily understood and put into practical effect, reference will now be made to the accompanying drawings which illustrate typical embodiments of this invention, and wherein:-

Fig. 1 illustrates a storage aide disposed in an operative attitude;

Fig. 2 illustrates the storage aide folded;

Fig. 3 is a view of the storage aide connected to a rectangular container;

Fig. 4 is an underside view of the container with storage aide attached from beneath;

Fig. 5 illustrates another form or storage aide;

Fig. 6 illustrates a further form of storage aide secured to a container;

Fig. 7 illustrates the corner connector for the storage aide illustrated in Fig. 6;

Fig. 8 illustrates the base part for the storage aide illustrated in Fig. 6, and

Fig. 9 illustrates a rack assembly for storing round containers.

Description of embodiments

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the storage aide illustrated is a one piece storage device 10 which has opposed corner connectors 11 and an intermediate ring 12 each being

formed of relatively stiff material and connected to one another by elastic portions 14 which are stretched in use to bias the intermediate ring 12 toward engagement with the base 16 of a container 15 to which the storage device is operatively attached.

The elastic portions 14 in this embodiment are each formed of spaced apart elastic longitudinal members 20 which are bridged by elastic transverse members 21 such that in use an outer end portion of each longitudinal member 20 may lie juxtaposed a respective container side face with a suitable one of the several loop portions 22 formed between the longitudinal members 20 and adjacent transverse members 21 encircling the respective lower corners 24 so as to locate the intermediate ring substantially centred on the diagonal line between those corners 24.

Each corner connector 11 is formed to hook into an open corner of the container and as illustrated in Fig. 3 the internal portions 25 of the connectors 11 are shaped to substantially conform to the internal corner of a container so as to be positively retained at the corner location and so that they form a minimal protrusion into the container 15 to maximise the size of another container which may be stored therebetween within the container 15.

In use, the storage device 10 is secured to a container 15 as illustrated such that the intermediate ring 12 is disposed substantially centrally beneath the base 16 of the container 15 by the stretched longitudinal members 20. The lid 27 for the container 15 or other lids may be inserted between the ring 12 and the base 16 for secure retention against the base 16 and such that the container 15 and the lid or lids secured therebeneath may be stored as a unit separate from other stored pieces in a storage area for retrieval as a unit enabling ready matching of the lids and the matching container suitably stored in the container 15.

The ring 12 provides a readily grasped member which may be resiliently pulled away or tilted from the base 16 if desired to enable a lid to be inserted and being of round

shape with a circular cross-section the biased ring 12 should not snag a lid as it is inserted into or withdrawn from its stowed position.

In the storage device 30 illustrated in Fig. 5 the termination means is in the form of a resilient ring 31 connected to the longitudinal members 32 at diagonally opposite positions thereon such that the ring may be stretched about the open top of a selected container above a lid flange thereof to provide corner connections at diagonally opposite corners of a container. It may also incorporate a retaining strap to secure the smaller containers stored in the selected container.

The storage aide may be moulded as a one-piece plastics article with suitable form stiffening, such as wire inserts at the corner connectors to enable them to maintain their operative shape and function as corner hooks. The storage aide may utilise different grades of plastics in different sections thereof to provide the stiffness and elasticity where necessary or suitable reinforcing may be incorporated to provide the necessary stiffness. Alternatively, separate elastic sections may be clipped or otherwise secured in place between the corner connectors and the intermediate ring to provide the desired elasticity for biasing the intermediate ring toward the base of a container on which the storage device 10 is utilised, and of course, rectangular as used herein includes substantially rectangular and square shapes.

The storage aide 40 illustrated in Figs. 6, 7 and 8 is assembled from four components, namely a pair of corner connectors 41, a base part 42 and an elastic band 43 which, as illustrated in Fig. 6, extends across the base part 42 to the corner connectors 41, only one of which is shown in Fig 6. At each corner connector 41 the elastic band 43, which has a round cross-section, hooks over a rounded support 44 provided at its inner end and terminated by a side flange 45 which has an inner ramped abutment 46 over which the band 43 has to be forced for capture in the corner connector 41.

The elastic band 43 is also captured in the base part 42 by having opposed ends of the band 43 pulled through end slots 47 and 48 with the intermediate portions 49, spanning the slots 47 and 48 trapped beneath inwardly directed fingers 50 which project inwardly from opposite sides of the base part 42 between the slots 47 and 48. The slots 47 and 48 are also provided with necking protrusions 51 at each end across which the band 43 has to be forced for capture in the ends of the slots 47 and 48.

Each corner connector 41 also has a returned catch member 53 which locates within the container 55 at a respective corner as illustrated at 56 in Fig. 6 and the opposing part of the connector 41 is cutaway at 57 to permit the connector 41 to locate about the corner projection 58 of the container.

An advantage of this embodiment is that the separate parts can be moulded of material specific to their use and the separate elastic band enables storage aids to be assembled utilising different length bands and or elastic properties for different applications.

The one piece elastic band 43 illustrated locates about opposed base corners of a container as in the previous embodiment. However this one-piece elastic band could also be formed with bridging bars between the opposed end portions which extend between the base part and the respective corner connectors to prevent excessive spreading of these opposed end portions where they pass over the base of the container.

Fig. 9 illustrates a storage rack assembly 60 for round containers 61 and their lids 62. This rack assembly has spaced pairs of longitudinal rails including a lower pair of closely spaced rails 63 for supporting small diameter lids on edge and upper more widely spaced rails 64 for supporting larger diameter lids on edge. An elevated central ring support 65 provides stable support for a relatively large bowl such that

there is space therebeneath to support very small lids at 67 lying flat on the rails 63 or 64. Arched end stops 68 are provided at each end of the rails to retain lids which are supported inclined against the bowl 69 supported in the elevated central ring support 65. The stops 68 may also provide anchors for an elastic strap which may be secured over the bowls and lids in the rack to make them more secure as a separately storable assembly.

In this embodiment, one end stop 68 and the rails 63, 64 attached thereto are received telescopically in respective co-axial tubular sockets 70, 71 respectively whereby that end stop 68 may be moved closer to or further away from the elevated central ring support 65 to suit the number and /or sizes of the lids to be supported at that side of the support 65.

It will of course be realised that the above has been given by way of illustrative example of the invention and that all modifications and variations thereto as would be apparent to persons skilled in the art are deemed to fall within the broad scope and ambit of this invention as is defined by the appended claims.

I CLAIM:

1. A storage aide for holding a container lid or a stack of container lids against the underside of a rectangular storage container including:-

termination means engageable with the open end of the container whereby corner connections are provided at diagonally opposite corners of the container;

an elastically stretchable support assembly extending between the corner connections and including location means which locate about the opposed base corners of the container beneath said diagonally opposite corners so as to maintain the intermediate portion of the elastically stretchable support assembly extending substantially diagonally across the container beneath the base thereof.

2. A storage aide as claimed in claim 1, wherein the termination means is a pair of opposed terminations each of which may be operatively retained at a respective opposing open corner of the open topped container to form the corner connections.

3. A storage aide as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein each termination is a terminating hook.

4. A storage aide as claimed in claim 3, wherein each terminating hook is formed so as to positively locate over an open corner of the container and is shaped to conform with said corner.

5. A storage aide as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the elastically stretchable support assembly is formed in one-piece from an elastically stretchable material.

6. A storage aide as claimed in claim 5, wherein the intermediate portion of the elastically stretchable support assembly adapted to extend substantially diagonally across the container beneath the base includes a relatively stiff lateral protrusion.

7. A storage aide as claimed in claim 5 or claim 6, wherein the location means is formed by respective locating apertures formed in the elastically stretchable support assembly and adjacent each termination means and adapted in use to locate about the base corners of a storage container.
8. A storage aide as claimed in claim 7, wherein the elastically stretchable support includes several locating apertures along each end portion thereof.
9. A storage aide as claimed in claim 8, wherein the locating apertures are defined by resilient portions of the elastically stretchable support assembly.
10. A storage aide substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
11. A method of storing a rectangular kitchen container and a selected lid, including:-
providing a storage aide as defined in any one of claims 1 to 10;
connecting the elastically stretchable support assembly to an open topped container by operatively engaging the termination means with the open top of the container and arranging the medial portion of the support assembly beneath the base of the container, and
inserting the selected lid between the medial portion and the base of the container such that the container with the retained lid may be stowed as a unit.
12. A supporting rack assembly having an elevated bowl support on or in which a large round bowl may be supported and a side rack on which lids may be supported beside the elevated bowl support.
13. A supporting rack assembly substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

14. A method of storing containers and their lids including:-

selecting the largest of a number of containers to be stored and placing smaller containers therein;

operatively connecting a storage aide as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 to the largest container by operatively engaging the termination means with the open top of the largest container and arranging the medial portion of the support assembly beneath the base of the largest container and extending substantially diagonally thereacross, and

inserting the selected lids between the medial portion and the base of the largest container whereby the containers with the lids retained therebeneath may be stowed as a unit in a storage area.

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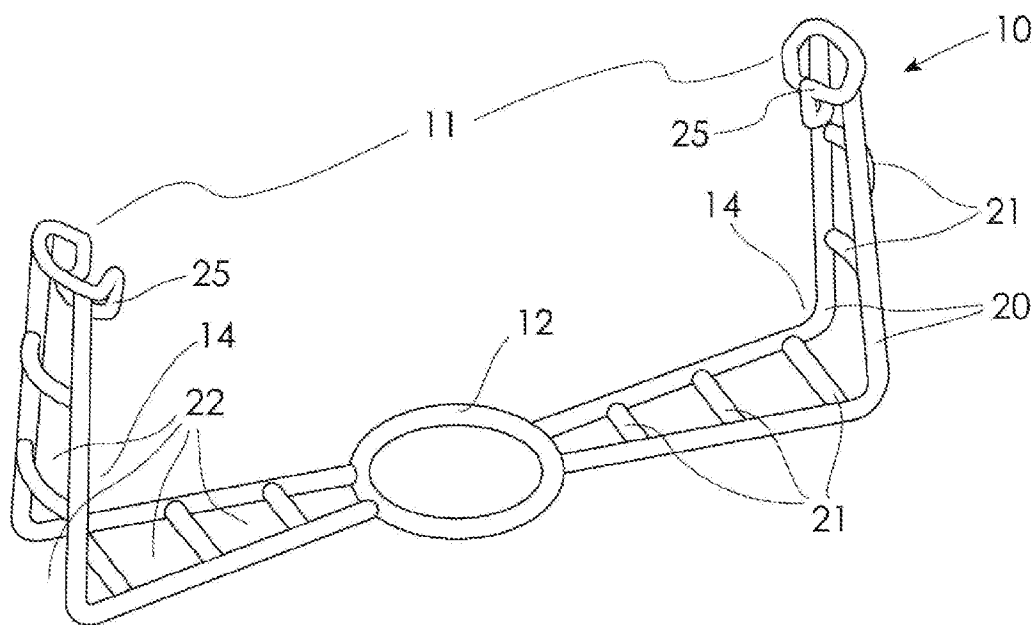


Fig. 1

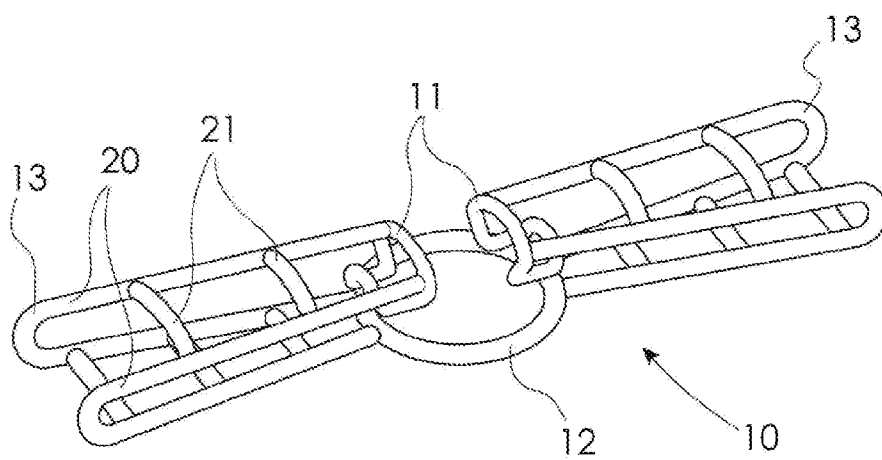


Fig. 2

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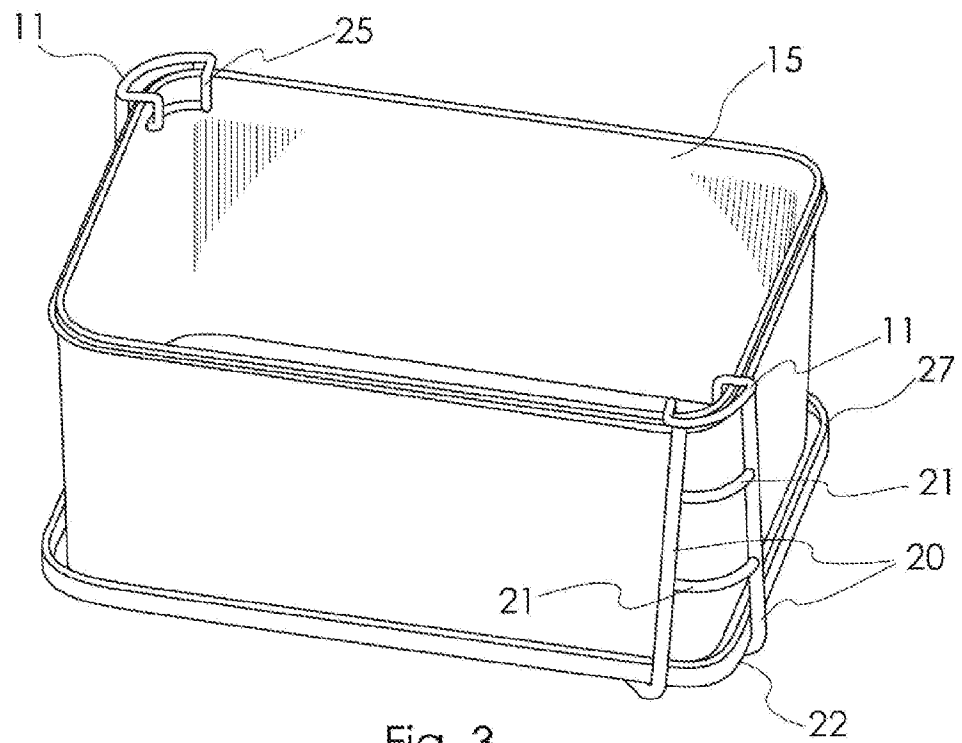


Fig. 3

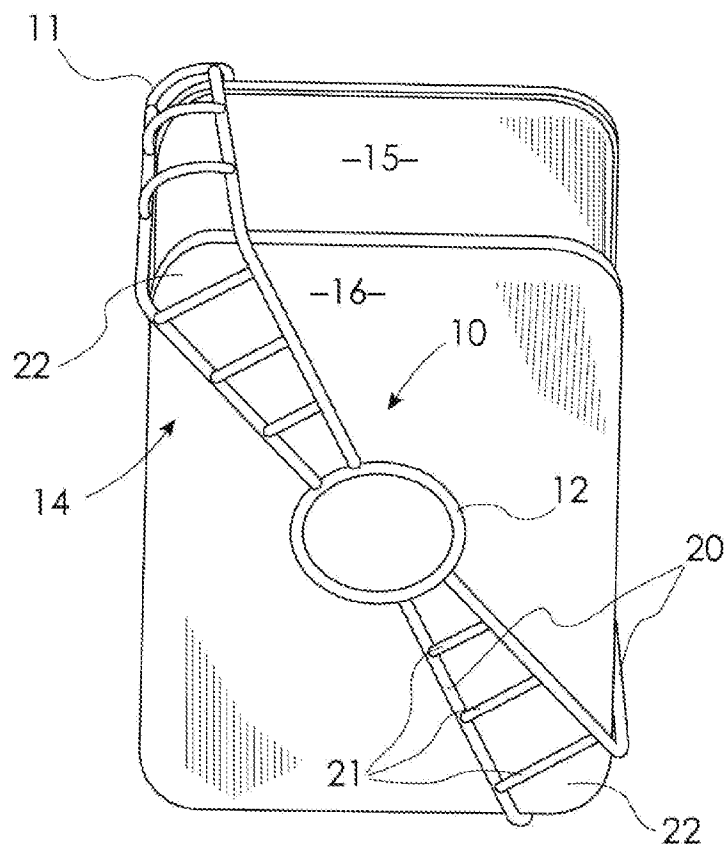


Fig. 4

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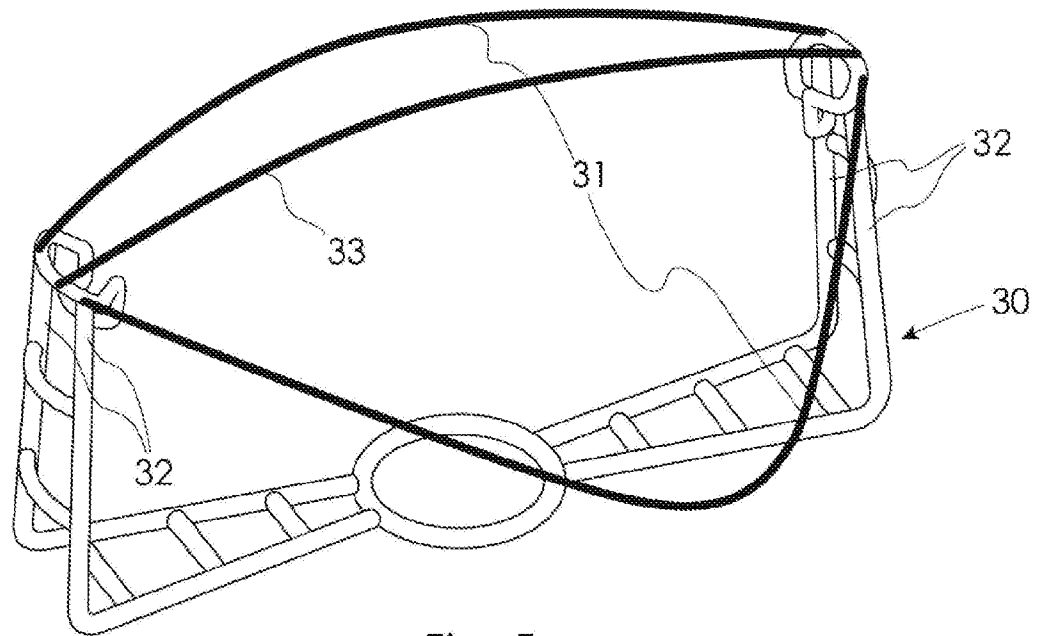


Fig. 5

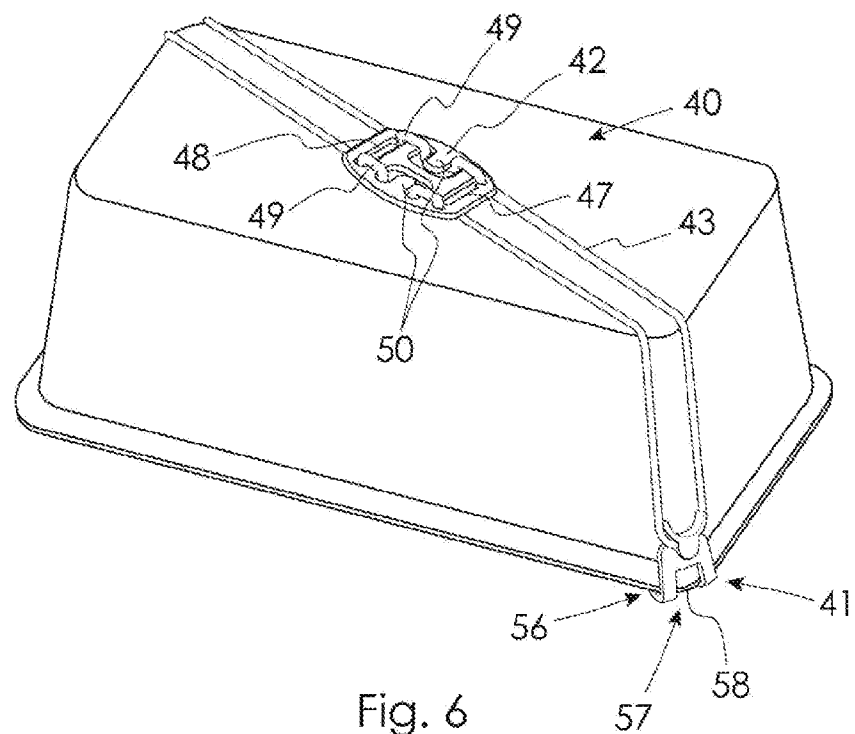


Fig. 6

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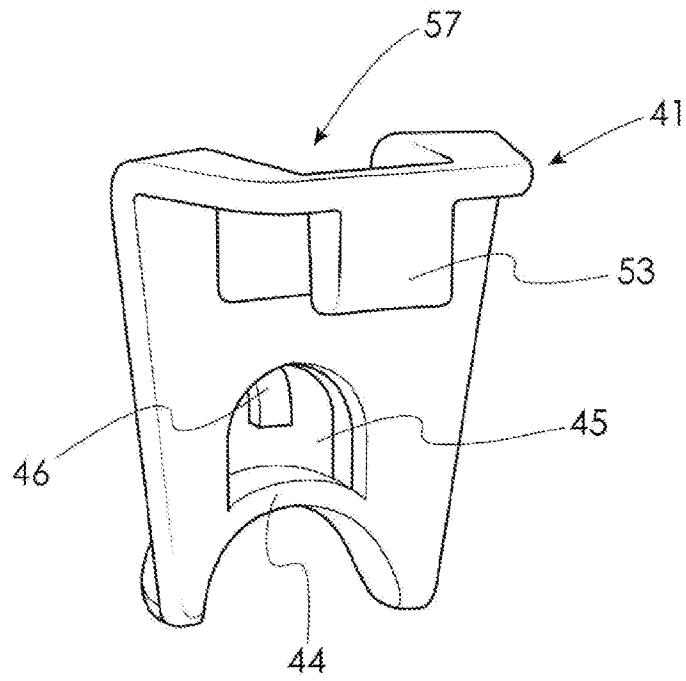


Fig. 7

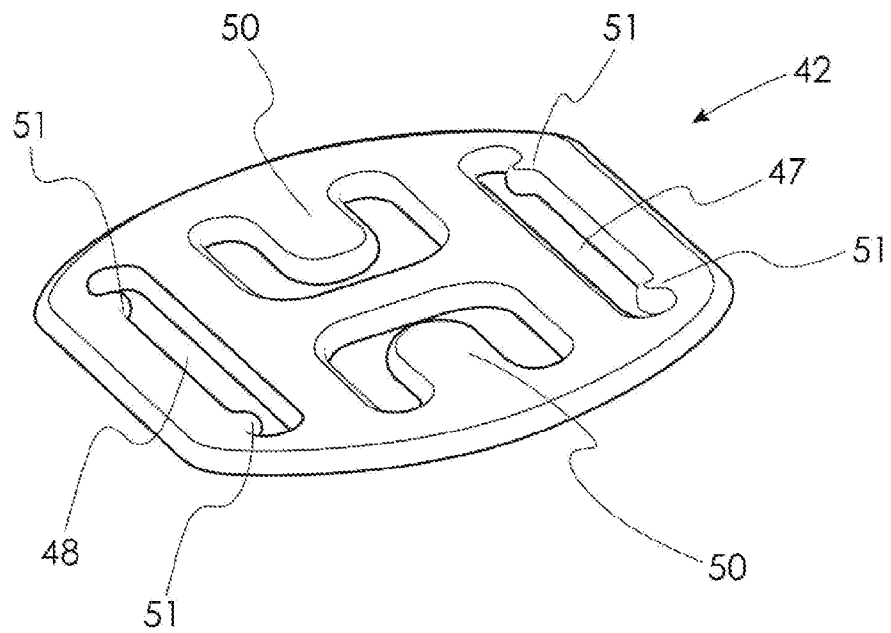


Fig. 8

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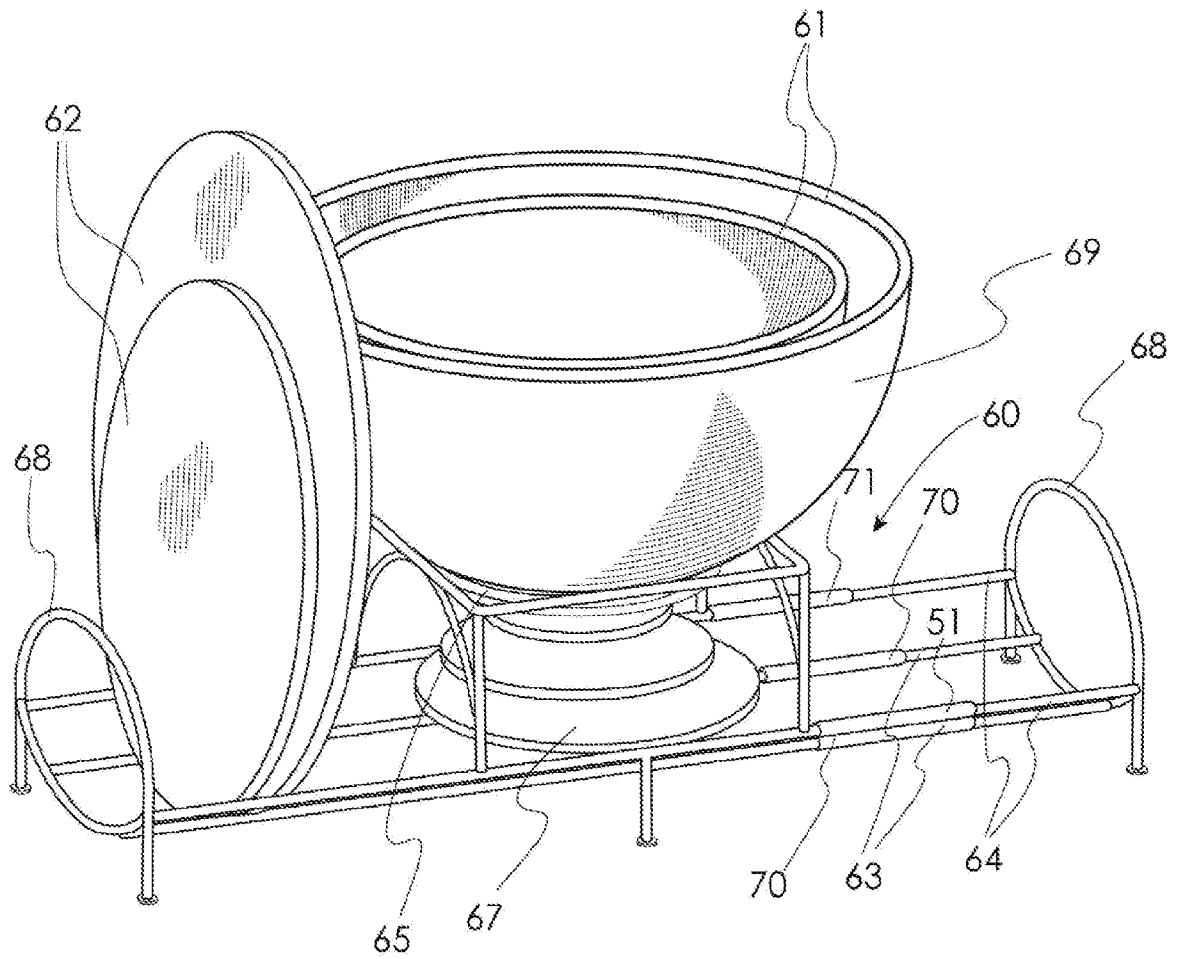


Fig. 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2014/000357

| | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|
| A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER B65D 55/16 (2006.01) | | |
| According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC | | |
| B. FIELDS SEARCHED | | |
| Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) | | |
| Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched | | |
| Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) WPI, EPODOC, TXTUS5, TXTUS4, TXTUS3, TXTUS2, TXTUS1, TXTUS0, TXTEP1, TXTGB1, TXTWO1, TXTAU1, TXTCA1: IPC/CPC: B65D55/16, B65D21/02, B65D43/02, B65D43/03, B65D45/02, B65D45/28, B65D51/02, B65D45/04, B65B13/00, B65D45, A47J36/12 and Keywords: clip, hold, lock, couple, arrest, grip, hook, engage, catch, retain, together, under, beneath, downside, elastic, stretch, resilient, spring, flex, deform, bias and similar terms. Applicant/inventor searched on Espacenet and Auspat. Citing and cited documents of relevant prior art viewed in Espacenet. Google Patents searched, Keywords: container, lid, storage, tie under, tupperware, cake, elastic, handle. | | |
| C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | |
| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
| | Documents are listed in the continuation of Box C | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex | | |
| * Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed | "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family | |
| Date of the actual completion of the international search 25 August 2014 | Date of mailing of the international search report 25 August 2014 | |
| Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA Email address: pct@ipaustalia.gov.au | Authorised officer Damir Budinski AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE (ISO 9001 Quality Certified Service) Telephone No. 02/62832948 | |

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2014/000357

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
the subject matter listed in Rule 39 on which, under Article 17(2)(a)(i), an international search is not required to be carried out, including
2. ☒ Claims Nos.: **10, 13**
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
See Supplemental Box
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a)

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

See Supplemental Box for Details

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☒ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:
1-9, 11, 14

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

| INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT | | International application No. |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | PCT/AU2014/000357 |
| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
| X | US 5797167 A (SCHWAB) 25 August 1998 figure 1; column 4, lines 7-8 | 1-9, 11, 14 |
| X Y | US 6675977 B2 (PARKS) 13 January 2004 figures 1, 2, 5 figure 1 | 1-9, 11, 14 1-9, 11, 14 |
| Y | US 2011/0049922 A1 (BURRELL) 03 March 2011 figures 1, 2 | 1-9, 11, 14 |
| Y | US D479947 S (CLAYPOOL) 30 September 2003 figure 1 | 1-9, 11, 14 |
| | | |

Form PCT/ISA/210 (fifth sheet) (July 2009)

Supplemental Box**Continuation of Box II**

The claim/s do/does not comply with Rule 6.2(a) because it/they rely on references to the description and/or drawings.

Continuation of: Box III

This International Application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention because it does not relate to one invention or to a group of inventions so linked as to form a single general inventive concept.

This Authority has found that there are different inventions based on the following features that separate the claims into distinct groups:

- 1. Claims 1-9, 11 and 14. The feature of a storage aide for holding a container lid including termination means and an elastically stretchable support is specific to this group of claims. This solves the problem of holding a container lid or a stack of container lids against the underside of a rectangular storage container or nested containers in a secure manner.
-
- 2. Claim 12. The feature of a supporting rack assembly having an elevated bowl support is specific to this group of claims. This solves the problem of supporting bowls and lids on the same rack.
-

PCT Rule 13.2, first sentence, states that unity of invention is only fulfilled when there is a technical relationship among the claimed inventions involving one or more of the same or corresponding special technical features. PCT Rule 13.2, second sentence, defines a special technical feature as a feature which makes a contribution over the prior art.

When there is no special technical feature common to all the claimed inventions there is no unity of invention.

In the above groups of claims, the identified features may have the potential to make a contribution over the prior art but are not common to all the claimed inventions and therefore cannot provide the required technical relationship. Therefore there is no special technical feature common to all the claimed inventions and the requirements for unity of invention are consequently not satisfied *a priori*.

| INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT Information on patent family members | | International application No. PCT/AU2014/000357 | |
|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| This Annex lists known patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information. | | | |
| Patent Document/s Cited in Search Report | | Patent Family Member/s | |
| Publication Number | Publication Date | Publication Number | Publication Date |
| US 5797167 A | 25 August 1998 | WO 9800349 A1 | 08 Jan 1998 |
| US 6675977 B2 | 13 January 2004 | US 6675977 B2 | 13 Jan 2004 |
| US 2011/0049922 A1 | 03 March 2011 | AU 2009219088 A1 | 03 Sep 2009 |
| | | CA 2763802 A1 | 03 Sep 2009 |
| | | EP 2257473 A1 | 08 Dec 2010 |
| | | WO 2009105806 A1 | 03 Sep 2009 |
| US D479947 S | 30 September 2003 | None | |
| End of Annex | | | |
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