

[54] CONTAINER COVER AND METHOD OF AFFIXING SAME

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[63] Continuation of Ser. No. 57,456, July 23, 1970, abandoned.

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[51] Int. Cl. B65b 7/28

[58] Field of Search 53/38; 150/0.5, 3, 150/52 R; 229/40, 43, 53, 62

[56] References Cited

UNITED STATES PATENTS

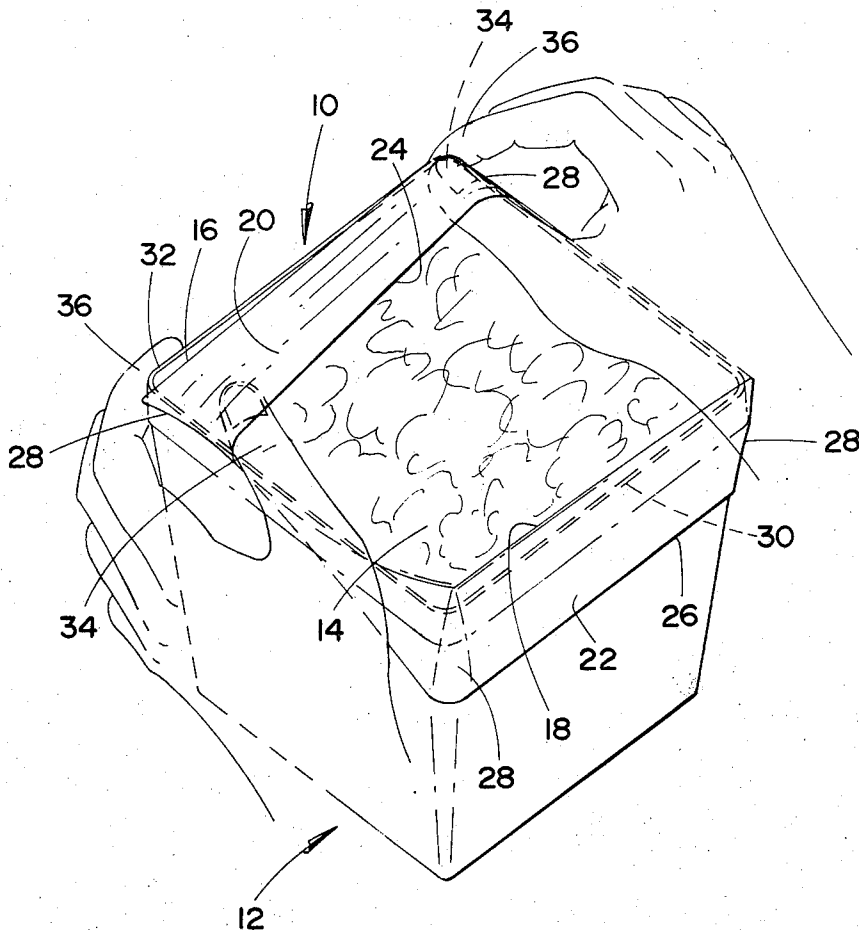
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[57] ABSTRACT

This invention relates to a flexible and preferably transparent protective cover for small boxes or cartons of the type customarily used to package fruits and vegetables that comprises a generally rectangular sheet of stretchable material like polyethylene formed to provide a pair of pockets on opposite faces of the sheet that extend laterally from side-to-side along both ends while opening toward one another. The invention also encompasses the novel method of affixing the protective cover to an open-topped rectangular berry carton which comprises inserting the thumbs or fingers in the opposite corners of the upper pocket while drawing the cover across the top of the carton until one of the edges of the latter is received within the bottom pocket, and folding the top pocket inside out over the opposite carton edge.

2 Claims, 3 Drawing Figures



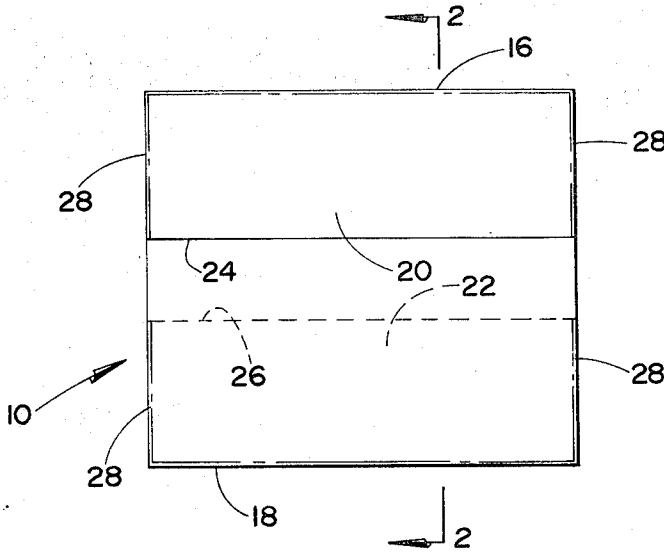


FIG. 1

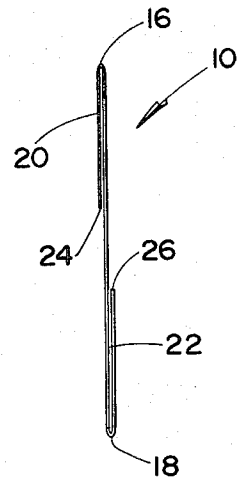


FIG. 2

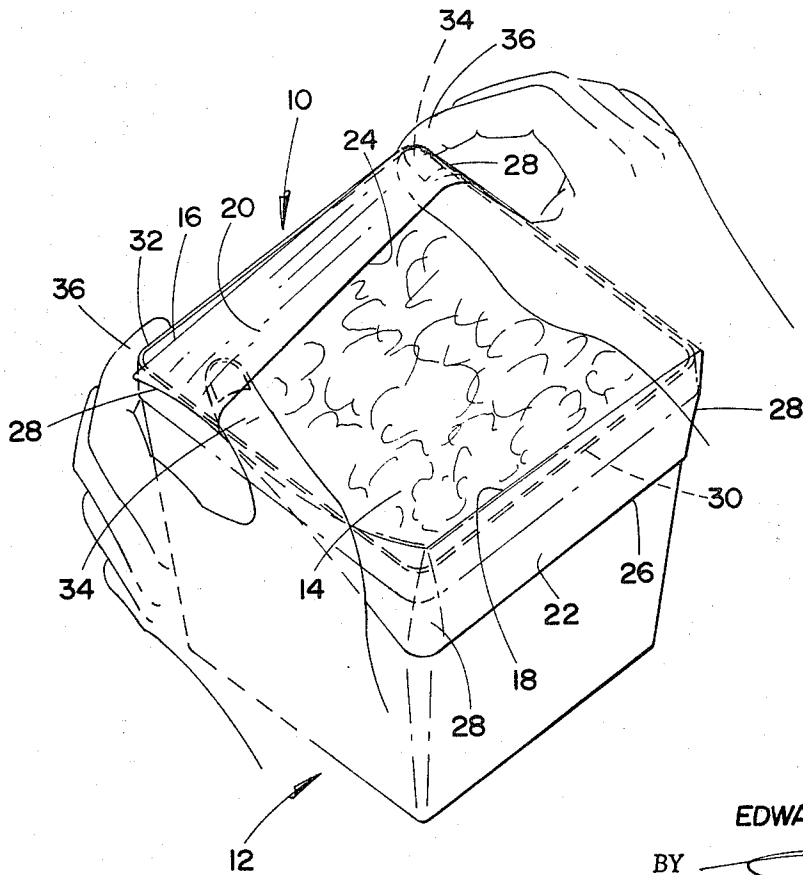


FIG. 3

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CONTAINER COVER AND METHOD OF AFFIXING SAME

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of Ser. No. 57,456, filed July 23, 1970, and now abandoned.

It is customary to package many varieties of the smaller fruits and vegetables in open-topped rectangular cartons that are usually fabricated from plastic or some form of cardboard or papier mache although the older wooden berry boxes are still sometimes used. In past years, it was customary to have these boxes uncovered, however, present day sanitary standards demand that they be covered to protect the contents from insects, airborne contaminants, handling by the customers and also to prevent pilferage. On the other hand, the nature of the contents is such that it must remain clearly visible so that the customer can inspect it for ripeness, bruises, spoilage, uniformity, size and general condition.

A thin clear and transparent sheet of some inexpensive plastic material like polyethylene is customarily draped over the top of the carton and then held in place by a rubber band or the like. Protective coverage of this type are too easily removed to adequately protect the contents and, once removed, they are seldom replaced if the customer decides to purchase a different box or carton. Such a covering affords little protection to the goods during shipment as it will usually come off by merely turning the carton upside down. Furthermore, the time and trouble involved in affixing covers like those mentioned above becomes considerable in a commercial packing operation, the additional expense of which must either be absorbed by the packer or passed on to the consumer.

It has now been determined in accordance with the teaching of the instant invention that these and other shortcomings of the prior art berry box covers and the like can be eliminated through the use of a novel double pocketed stretchable member preferably formed from a clear transparent sheet of polyethylene. The cover is rectangular and conforms generally to the shape of the open top of the carton although slightly larger than the latter. The pockets open toward one another from opposite ends but they are located on different faces of the sheet.

The novel method of affixing the cover to the box includes inserting one edge of the box into the pocket on the underside of the sheet while drawing the latter across the open top and then turning the upper pocket inside out as it is being turned down over the opposite edge. The above-described method tightly covers the box or carton in one continuous quick motion and without the benefit of auxiliary fasteners. The resulting package protects the contents better than the prior art covers while, at the same time, leaving them clearly visible for inspection by the purchaser.

It is, therefore, the principal object of the present invention to provide a novel and improved clear transparent cover for small rectangular cartons of the type customarily used for fresh produce.

A second objective of the invention herein disclosed and claimed is to provide a unique method of affixing the cover to the carton.

Another object is to provide a box cover of the type aforementioned that is quite inexpensive and, therefore, disposable.

Still another objective is the provision of a method of affixing the box cover of the instant invention that is fast, simple, efficient and requires only minimal manual skill.

An additional object is to provide a stretchable box cover that will stretch and otherwise deform to whatever reasonable degree necessary to accommodate the contents of an overfilled carton while being affixed to the latter.

Further objects of the invention are to provide a berry box cover that is readily adaptable to rectangular cartons of various sizes and shapes, one that requires no supplementary fasteners yet cooperates with the carton to form a secure package for the contents, a device for covering produce in cartons that leaves the contents visible for customer inspection, and a unit that can be easily and inexpensively fabricated with relatively simple equipment.

Other objects will be in part apparent and in part pointed out specifically hereinafter in connection with the description of the drawings that follow, and in which:

FIG. 1 is a plan view showing the produce carton cover prior to its being used;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view thereof taken along line 2-2 of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 3 is a perspective view showing the cover being affixed to a carton as viewed from a position above and to the left rear thereof.

Referring next to the drawings for a detailed description of the present invention and initially, to FIG. 3 for this purpose, reference numeral 10 has been selected to designate the cover in a general way while reference numeral 12 has been employed to similarly denote the open-topped rectangular carton it fits upon. Carton 12 may either be rectangular or square as shown and be fabricated from any one of several different materials, the more usual ones being plastic, wood and papier mache. The contents 14 of the carton are, of course, unimportant although the cover of the present invention finds as its primary purpose the protection of fresh fruits and vegetables while, at the same time, revealing such produce to inspection by the prospective purchaser.

Next, while reference to FIGS. 1 and 2, it will be seen that the cover 10 is shaped approximately like the open top of the box or carton it is to cover although preferably somewhat larger in each dimension so that it is slightly oversize. Opposite margins 16 and 18 of the cover are each provided with a pocket, the one adjacent edge 16 having been given reference character 20 while the one on the other edge is designated 22. These pockets are identical in that they open toward one another and extend substantially all the way across. One pocket however, is on the upper surface of the cover while the other is on the underside thereof. As illustrated, pocket 20 is on top and pocket 22 on the bottom.

In the case of a rectangular as opposed to a square cover, the pockets may be located along either the sides or the ends and the unit will still function as intended. The preferred form, however, would be to place the pockets along the sides because, despite the fact that somewhat more material is required for side

pockets in contrast to end pockets, the cover will fit the box more securely when turned said pockets are down over its sides.

A number of different stretchable sheet plastic materials can be used for the cover of the present invention, but, thin sheet polyethylene seems preferable for a number of reasons. To begin with, it is quite inexpensive and, since the cover is seldom reused or even reuseable once it has been removed, this becomes an important factor. Polyethylene is clear as well as being transparent so that the contents of the carton can be viewed by the customer in their true color, this being another factor of considerable importance in judging quality.

One of the most important qualities of polyethylene when used as a covering for produce boxes is its ability to stretch. This enables the cover to encompass over-filled cartons and, most important, it enables the upwardly opening pocket or cuff 20 to be turned inside out and folded down over the edge of the carton. While some "elasticity" is desirable and is present in thin sheet polyethylene, it is not as significant a property as its "stretchability" insofar as the present application is concerned.

The depth of the cuffs or pockets as measured from the free edge 24 and 26 thereof to the opposite folded edge 16 or 18, respectively, is not critical so long as there is ample material to extend at least part way down along the sides of the carton. A shallow cuff or pocket is, however, preferable to the overly deep one because of the extra material in the latter this is performing little, if any, useful function and also because of the increased propensity of the scaled side edges 28 to tear from the free edge 24 down as the corners of the carton are placed therein. Such tearing is not detrimental so long as it does not extend all the way to the bottom folded edge 26 of the pocket and this seldom happens. Obviously, the flap thus freed along the top edge of the pocket is useless from a functional and from an aesthetic standpoint; therefore, a shallow cuff of somewhere between approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth is all that is needed.

The sealed margins 28 bordering the sides of each pocket are heat sealed in the conventional manner although, of course, they can be cemented or otherwise fashioned. These sealed edges need not necessarily be closely adjacent the corresponding margins of the rectangular sheet on which the pockets are formed, however, there is no practical reason for doing otherwise.

The method by which the cover is attached to the open-topped carton is best shown by looking, once again, at FIG. 3 to which reference will now be made. Basically, the method involves placing the cover 10 so that one of the pockets is nearest the operator while the other is remote therefrom. As will appear presently, it does not particularly matter which pocket is where. Next, the fingers or thumbs as the case may be are inserted into the corners of the top or upwardly opening pocket 20 and the cover is drawn across the open top of the container 12 so as to introduce on edge 20 thereof into the bottom or downwardly opening pocket 22. Then, the cover is stretched across the top of the carton toward the opposite edge 32 thereof; whereupon, the final step in the operation is performed, namely, turning the upwardly opening pocket 20 inside out while simultaneously folding the latter down over said opposite edge 32.

Now, in the particular form of the method illustrated in FIG. 3, edge 30 is the near edge and the downwardly opening pocket 22 is placed nearest the operator which means, of course, that the thumbs 34 are placed in the corners of the top pocket 20 and it is pushed away from the operator before being turned inside out and folded down over remote edge 32. This is the preferred, and to most people the easiest, method of affixing the cover to the container because one can grasp the far side of the carton with the fingers and hold it in place while the thumbs in the corners of the top pocket are drawing it toward the remote edge preparatory to folding it down over the latter. On the other hand, it is quite possible to reverse the above procedure and use the thumbs as stops against the near side of the carton while the fore-fingers 36 inserted in the corners of the top pocket are employed to pull it toward the operator. In the latter case, the top pocket 20 must be located adjacent the operator while the bottom pocket is remote therefrom. The problem with the latter technique is that most persons experience more difficulty in rolling the wrists toward them to turn the pocket inside out and fold it down over the near edge than to perform the same operation on the far edge by rolling the wrists away or, more explicitly, from a "palms-down" toward a "palm-up" position.

There remains, of course, a third so-called "side-to-side" method of mounting the cover which is the least preferred of the three. In this one, the box or carton is held in one hand or otherwise maintained in a fixed position while the thumb and a finger of the other hand are inserted in the corners of the upper pocket and used to draw it from side-to-side across the top of the box as with the other two methods. If the fingers of the right hand are used, the operator will ordinarily locate the bottom pocket 22 on the left and draw the top pocket 20 across from left to right because this is somewhat handier when it comes to rolling the wrist to turn the pocket inside out than trying to perform this same operation with the right hand on the left edge of the carton. Obviously, the situation noted above is reversed when the left hand is used instead of the right.

What is claimed is:

1. The cover for open topped rectangular cartons and the like which comprises: a rectangular sheet of stretchable material having a first relatively shallow pocket on the underside thereof extending along one edge and opening toward the opposite edge in position to leave a substantial area exposed therebetween, said pocket defining a cuff adapted to engage and hook over the rim of a carton when the exposed area of the sheet is drawn across the open top thereof, and a second relatively shallow pocket on top of the sheet extending along the edge opposite that carrying said first pocket positioned to open toward the latter, said second pocket terminating short of the first and defining a second marginal cuff adapted to fit down over the rim of the carton remote from that engaged by said first pocket when folded inside out thereover.

2. The method of covering an open topped rectangular carton with a stretchable rectangular cover having a pair of shallow pockets extending across opposite marginal areas thereof that open toward one another on its top and bottom faces which comprises the steps of: grasping the cover in the corners of the top pocket and drawing same across the open top of the carton until the bottom pocket on the trailing edge thereof catches onto the rim; pulling the cover taut until the bottom pocket stretches open to define a downwardly-extending skirt along the portion of the rim engaged thereby; and, turning the top pocket inside out while simultaneously folding it down over the rim of the carton opposite that engaged by said bottom pocket.

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