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(54) **COMPARTMENTALIZED CONTAINER**

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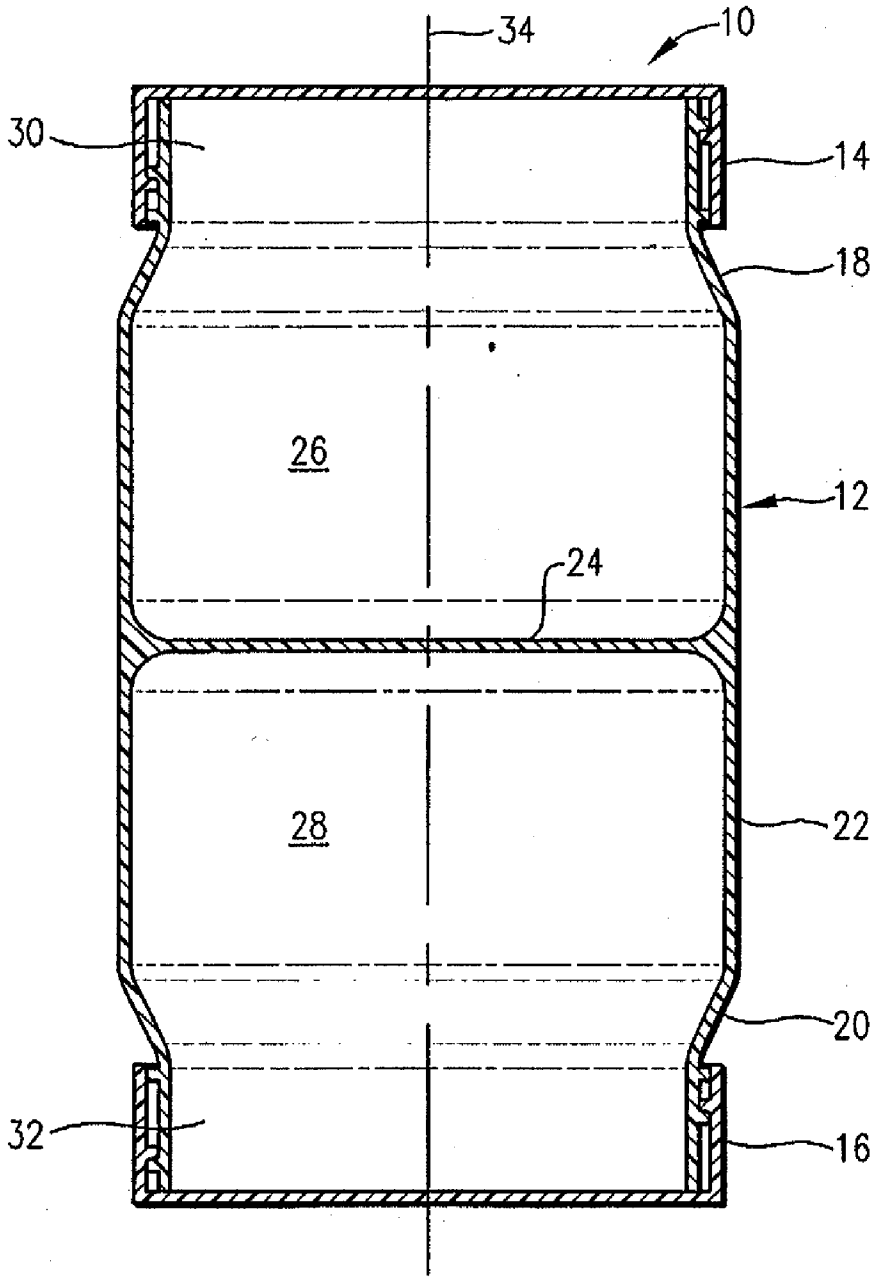
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A dual-compartment container having separate, oppositely-facing openings for accessing each compartment of the container.



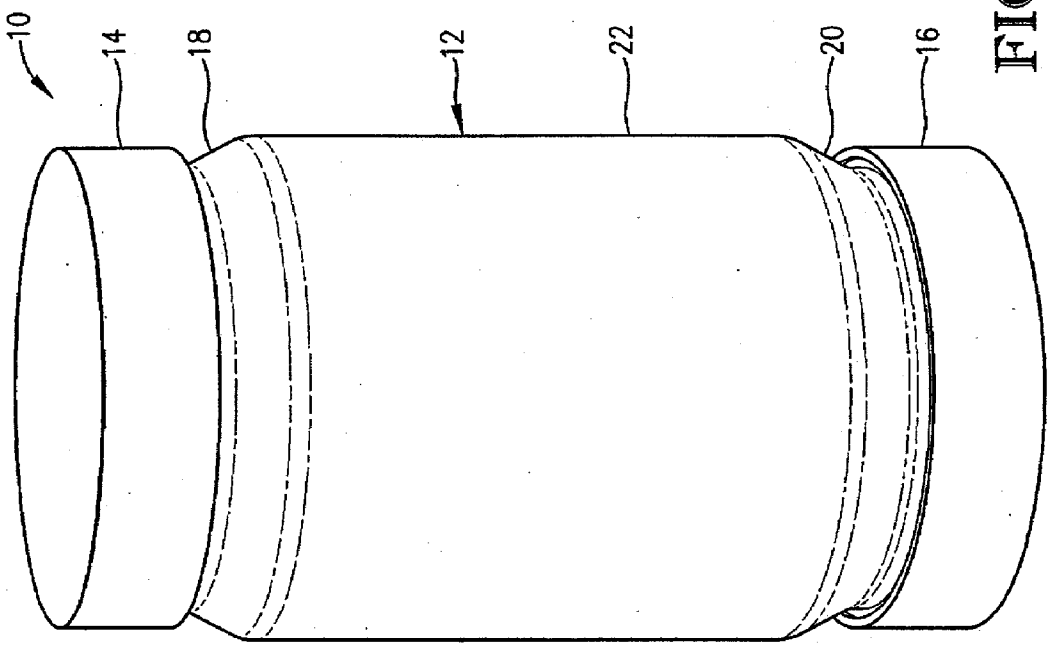


FIG. 2

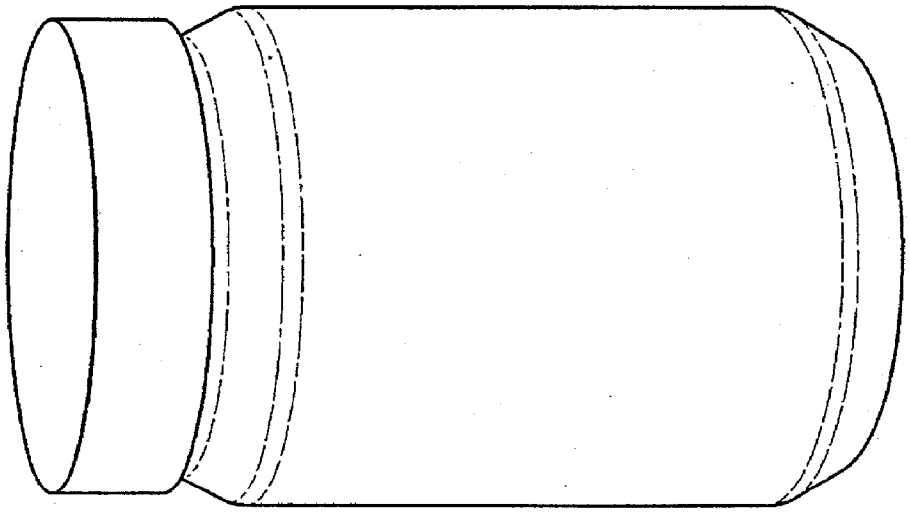


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

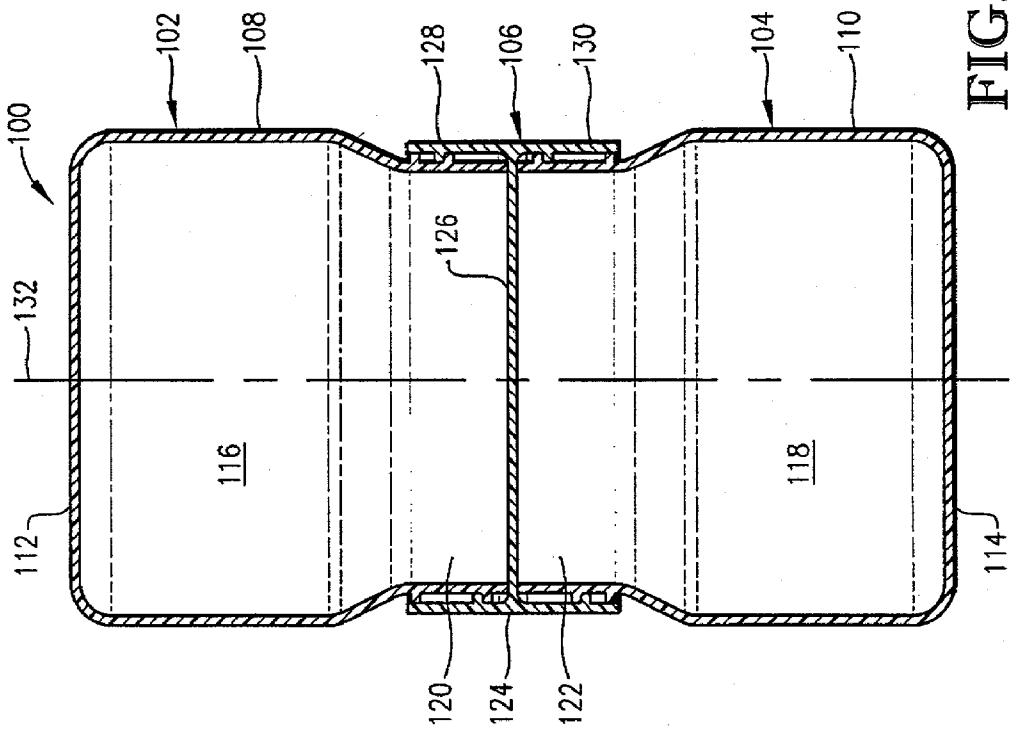

100
102
108
128
106
130
104
110
126
132
116
118
112
114
120
124
122

FIG. 4

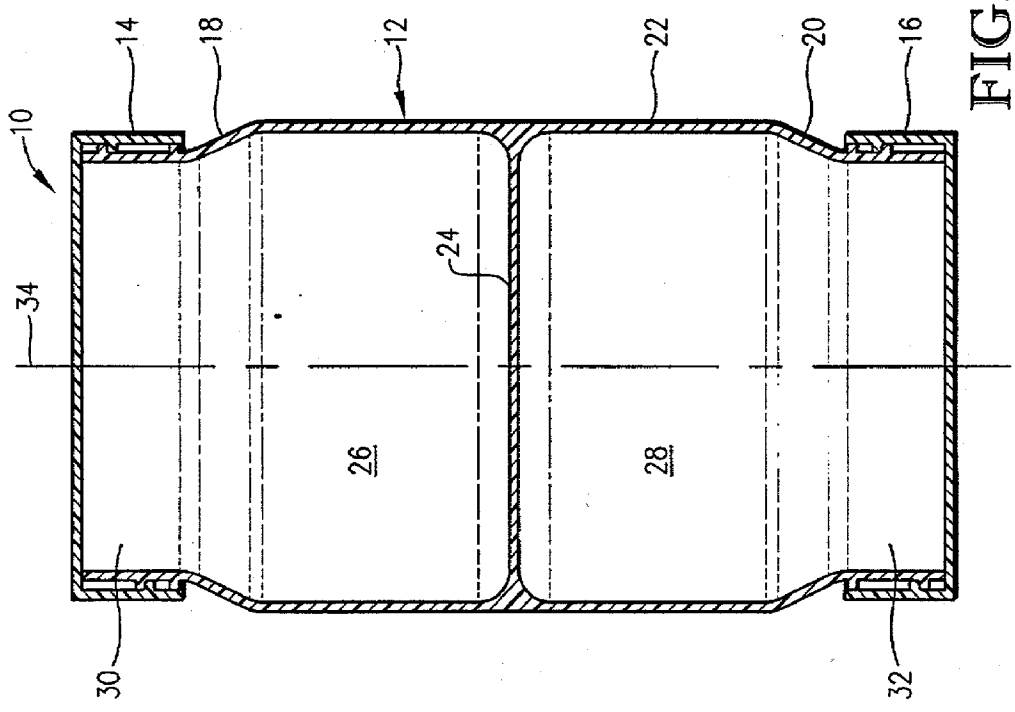

10
14
18
12
22
20
16
24
34
26
28
30
32

FIG. 3

COMPARTMENTALIZED CONTAINER

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates generally to multiple-compartment containers. In another aspect, the invention concerns a dual-compartment food storage container having separate openings for accessing the individual compartments.

[0003] 2. Description of the Prior Art

[0004] Food storage containers, such as containers employed for storing peanut butter, mayonnaise, and jelly, are typically constructed of an elongated, substantially cylindrical sidewall having an end wall coupled to one end and a lid coupled to the other end. Such containers define a single internal compartment within which the food is stored. Because the height of the container is typically greater than the width of the container, the opening for accessing the internal compartment is narrow relative to the depth of the internal compartment.

[0005] A container configured with a narrow opening and deep storage compartment can be inconvenient because once a substantial portion of the food (e.g., peanut butter, mayonnaise, or jelly) stored in the container has been used, it can be difficult to access the remaining portion of the food with standard-length utensils without inserting your hand at least partially through the opening in the container. Although the opening for many of these containers is not wide enough for a hand to be inserted completely through the opening, frequently at least a portion of the hand is contacted with the rim around the opening, thereby causing the food residue around the opening of the container to be contacted with the hand. Thus, when scooping the food out of the container with a standard utensil, the hand of the person retrieving the food can get messy because of food scraped off the rim of the container by the hand. Further, contacting the inner portion of the container with a hand can transmit germs from the hand into the food storage compartment of the container.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0006] Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a food-storage container that has shallow enough food-storage compartments so that the hand of a person accessing the food in the container does not contact the internal surface of the compartment.

[0007] A further object of the present invention is to provide a method of retrieving food from a dual-compartment food storage container.

[0008] In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a container comprising a pair of separate compartments and a lid. Each of the compartments has an opening for accessing the compartment. The openings face in generally opposite directions. The lid covers at least one of the openings to thereby isolate the compartment associated with the covered opening.

[0009] In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a container comprising a monolithic body, a first lid, and a second lid. The body defines first and second compartments. The body includes a common divider wall defining a portion of both compartments. The body defines first and second openings for providing access to the first and second compartments, respectively. The first and second openings face in generally opposite directions. The first lid is releasably coupled to the body and covers the first opening. The second lid is releasably coupled to the body and covers the second opening.

[0010] In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a container comprising a first body, a second body, and a common lid. The first body defines a first compartment and a first opening for accessing the first compartment. The second body defines a second compartment and a second opening for accessing the second compartment. The common lid is releasably coupled to both the first and second bodies and covers both the first and second openings.

[0011] In accordance with still another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method of removing food from a dual-compartment food storage container. The method comprises the steps of: (a) uncovering a first container opening to thereby provide access to a first compartment of the container; (b) inserting a scooping element through the first container opening and into the first compartment; (c) scooping food out of the first compartment using the scooping element; (d) uncovering a second container opening to thereby provide access to a second compartment of the container, wherein the first and second container openings face in generally opposite directions when covered; (e) inserting a scooping element through the second container opening and into the second compartment; and (f) scooping food out of the second compartment using the scooping element.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0012] The preferred embodiments of the present invention are described in detail below with reference to the attached drawing figures, wherein:

[0013] **FIG. 1** is an isometric view of a prior art single-compartment storage container;

[0014] **FIG. 2** is an isometric view of a dual-compartment storage container constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0015] **FIG. 3** is a sectional side view of the dual-compartment storage container illustrated in **FIG. 2**, particularly illustrating the separate internal compartments of the container and the common divider wall separating the two compartments; and

[0016] **FIG. 4** is a sectional side view of a dual-compartment storage container constructed in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention, particularly illustrating a common lid which separates the two internal compartments of the container.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] Referring initially to **FIGS. 2 and 3**, a dual-compartment container **10** is illustrated as generally comprising a main body **12**, a first lid **14**, and a second lid **16**. First lid **14** is releasably coupled to a first end **18** of body **12**, while second lid **16** is releasably coupled to a second end **20** of body **12**.

[0018] Referring now to **FIG. 3**, main body **12** generally comprises a sidewall **22** and a common divider/end wall **24**. Main body **12** defines a first compartment **26** and a separate second compartment **28**. First and second compartments **26, 28** are separated from one another by common divider wall **24**. Body **12** defines a first opening **30** for providing access to first compartment **26** and a second opening **32** for providing access to second compartment **28**. When first and second lids **14, 16** are coupled to body **12**, first and second lids **14, 16** cover first and second openings **30, 32**, respectively, to thereby isolate first and second compartments **26, 28** from one another and from the external environment. Preferably, each lid **14, 16** is threadably coupled to body **12** via a conventional threaded connection commonly employed for food storage containers.

[0019] The overall shape of dual-compartment container **10** is important for a number of reasons, including, for example, minimizing the materials of construction, maximizing storage volume of the compartments, facilitating efficient transport of bulk quantities of the containers, and ensuring easy retrieval of the stored substance from the container without contacting human hands with the internal surface of the storage compartments.

[0020] It is preferred for sidewall **22** to be substantially cylindrically shaped. Sidewall **22** extends along and is substantially centered on a longitudinal container axis **34**. Longitudinal container axis **34** extends through the geometric center and center of gravity of container **10**, but does not extend through any portion of sidewall **22**. Common divider wall **24** extends radially inward from sidewall **22**. Preferably, common divider wall **24** is substantially disc-shaped and is substantially centered on longitudinal container axis **34**. Common divider wall **24** separates first and second compartments **26, 28** from one another and defines a portion of both compartments **26, 28**. The flat, radially extending, disc shape of common divider wall **24** separates compartments **26, 28** in a manner such that no portion of compartments **26, 28** are coextensive along longitudinal container axis **34** (i.e., first and second compartments **26, 28** are entirely axially spaced from one another).

[0021] First and second openings **30, 32** face in generally opposite directions. Preferably, first and second openings **30, 32** face away from each other in directions which are at least substantially parallel to the direction of extension of longitudinal container axis **34**. First and second openings **30, 32** are preferably substantially circular in shape and are substantially centered on longitudinal container axis **34** so that longitudinal container axis **34** extends through the geometric center of both first and second openings **30, 32**. Thus, when first and second lids **14, 16** are covering first and second openings **30, 32**, first and second lids **14, 16** are substantially centered on longitudinally container axis **34**.

[0022] Dual-compartment container **10** preferably has a generally elongated cylindrical configuration similar to that of conventional food storage containers (e.g., containers for storing peanut butter, jelly, or mayonnaise). A significant disadvantage of such conventional elongated cylindrical food storage containers is that the food storage compartment is very deep relative to the width of the opening, thereby making food stored in the bottom portion of the container difficult to reach with standard utensils. However, in the present inventive dual-compartment container **10**, common divider wall **24** divides body **12** into two separate storage compartments **26, 28** instead of one. Each compartment **26, 28**, therefore, is approximately half as deep as the single compartment of a similarly-sized conventional container. Thus, in order to provide easy access to all portions of compartments **26, 28**, it is preferred for the ratio of the depth of compartments **26, 28** to the diameter of the respective opening **30, 32** associated with that compartment **26, 28** to be in the range of from about 0.3:1 to about 2:1, more preferably in the range of from 0.5:1 to 1:1. The depth of compartments **26, 28** is preferably in the range of from about 1 inch to about 6 inches, more preferably in the range of from 2 inches to 4 inches. The diameter of openings **30, 32** is preferably in the range of from about 1 inch to about 18 inches, more preferably in the range of from about 2 inches to about 8 inches, and most preferably in the range of from 3 inches to 5 inches. The total height of container **10** is preferably in the range of from about 2 inches to about 24 inches, more preferably in the range of from about 4 inches to about 12 inches, and most preferably from 5 inches to 9 inches. It is also preferred for first and second ends **18, 20** of main body **12** to be narrower than sidewall **22** so that when lids **14, 16** are coupled to ends **18, 20**, lids **14, 16** are not substantially wider than sidewall **22**. Preferably the ratio of the width of sidewall **22** to the width of lids **14, 16** is in the range of from about 0.7:1 to about 1.1:1, more preferably in the range of 0.8:1 to 1:1.

[0023] Referring now to **FIG. 4**, an alternative dual-compartment container **100** is illustrated as generally comprising a first body **102**, a second body **104**, and a common lid **106**. First and second bodies **102, 104** include respective first and second sidewalls **108, 110** and first and second end walls **112, 114**. First and second bodies **102, 104** define respective first and second compartments **116, 118**, having respective first and second openings **120, 122**. First and second bodies **102, 104** are adapted to be releasably coupled to common lid **106** so that common lid **106** covers both first and second openings **120, 122**.

[0024] Common lid **106** generally includes an outer connection ring **124** and a cover plate **126** which acts as a common divider wall between first and second compartments **116, 118** when first and second bodies **102, 104** are coupled to common lid **106**. Preferably, connection ring **124** includes a first threaded section **128** for releasably coupling lid **106** to first body **102** and a second threaded section **130** for releasably coupling lid **106** to second body **104**. Cover plate **126** is preferably a generally disc-shaped member which is axially positioned between first and second threaded sections **128, 130** and extends radially inward from outer connection ring **124**.

[0025] When assembled, dual-compartment container **100** is elongated along a longitudinal container axis **132** which extends through the geometric center and center of gravity of container **100**. Sidewalls **108, 110** are preferably substantially cylindrical and centered on longitudinal container axis **132**. End walls **112, 114** extend generally radially inward from a respective end of a respective sidewall **108, 110**. When container **100** is assembled, cover plate **126** of common lid **106** is axially spaced from and disposed generally between first and second end walls **112, 114**. Preferably, end walls **112, 114** and lid **106** are substantially centered on longitudinal container axis **132** with longitudinal container axis **132** piercing the geometric center of end walls **112, 114**

and cover plate **126**. Preferably, longitudinal container axis **132** does not pass through any portion of sidewalls **108, 110** when container **100** is assembled.

[**0026**] First and second openings **120, 122** of first and second bodies **102, 104** face in generally opposite directions. Preferably, first and second openings **120, 122** face toward one another in directions which are substantially parallel to the direction of extension of longitudinal container axis **132**.

[**0027**] Referring to **FIGS. 3 and 4**, the overall size and shape of dual-compartment container **100** (shown in **FIG. 4**) is preferably substantially similar to the overall size and shape of dual-compartment container **10** (shown in **FIG. 3**), with the main difference between the two being that cover plate **126** of common lid **106** of container **100** separates first and second compartments **116, 118** of container **100**, while common divider wall **24** of container **10** separates first and second compartments **26, 28** of container **10**. Dual-compartment containers **10, 100** can be formed of any suitable material such as glass, metal, and/or plastic.

[**0028**] In operation, food stored in the internal compartments of dual-compartment containers **10, 100** can be removed by simply uncovering one of the openings to one of the compartments and inserting a utensil into the compartment associated with that opening. The utensil can then be used to scoop food out of the compartment. The other compartment can be accessed in a substantially similar fashion.

[**0029**] The preferred forms of the invention described above are to be used as illustration only, and should not be used in a limiting sense to interpret the scope of the present invention. Obvious modifications to the exemplary embodiments, set forth above, could be readily made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit of the present invention.

[**0030**] The inventor hereby states his intent to rely on the Doctrine of Equivalents to determine and assess the reasonably fair scope of the present invention as pertains to any apparatus not materially departing from but outside the literal scope of the invention as set forth in the following claims.

1. A container comprising:

a body defining a pair of separate compartments and a pair of openings each associated with one of the compartments, said openings facing in generally opposite directions; and

a lid releasably coupled to the body and covering at least one of the openings to thereby isolate the compartment associate with said at least one of the openings.

2. A container according to claim 1,

said compartments being separated by a common divider wall.

3. A container according to claim 2,

said common divider wall being generally disk shaped.

4. A container according to claim 1,

said openings being generally circular and having a diameter in the range of from about 1 inch to about 18 inches,

wherein the ratio of the depth of each compartment to the diameter of the opening associated with that compartment is in the range of from about 0.3:1 to about 2:1.

5. A container according to claim 4,

each of said openings having a diameter in the range of from 2 inches to 8 inches.

6. A container according to claim 5,

wherein the ratio of the depth of each compartment to the diameter of the opening associated with that compartment is in the range of from 0.5:1 to 1:1.

7. A container according to claim 1,

said body extending along a longitudinal container axis,

said longitudinal container axis extending through both openings.

8. A container according to claim 7,

each of said openings facing in directions which are substantially parallel to the direction of extension of the longitudinal container axis.

9. A container according to claim 7,

said openings being substantially centered on the longitudinal container axis.

10. A container according to claim 7,

said body including a generally axially extending sidewall and a generally radially extending end wall,

said end wall being axially spaced from both openings.

11. A container according to claim 10,

said end wall being substantially centered on the longitudinal axis,

said sidewall being generally cylindrical and substantially centered on the longitudinal container axis.

12. A container comprising:

a monolithic body defining first and second compartments, said body including a common divider wall defining a portion of both compartments, said body defining first and second openings for providing access to the first and second compartments respectively, said first and second openings facing in generally opposite directions from one another;

a first lid releasably coupled to the body and covering the first opening; and

a second lid releasably coupled to the body and covering the second opening.

13. A container according to claim 12,

said body extending along a longitudinal container axis,

said compartments being axially spaced from one another,

said openings being axially spaced from one another,

said common divider wall being axially positioned between the openings,

said longitudinal container axis extending through both openings.

14. A container according to claim 13,

said body including a generally cylindrical sidewall,

said common divider wall extending radially inward from the sidewall,

said openings being substantially circular.

15. A container according to claim 14,

said openings, said sidewall, and said common divider wall being substantially centered on the longitudinal container axis.

16. A container according to claim 15,

said body being configured so that the ratio of the depth of each of the compartments to the diameter of the opening associated with that compartment is in the range of from 0.5:1 to 1:1.

17. A container according to claim 16,

said first and second openings each having a diameter in the range of from 2 inches to 8 inches.

18. A container according to claim 17,

said lids being threadably coupled to generally opposite ends of the body.

19. A container comprising:

a first body defining a first compartment and a first opening for accessing the first compartment;

a second body defining a second compartment and a second opening for accessing the second compartment; and

a common lid releasably coupled to both bodies and covering both openings.

20. A container according to claim 19,

said first and second openings facing in generally opposite directions.

21. A container according to claim 20,

said bodies and said lid being substantially aligned along a common container axis,

said common container axis extending through both openings.

22. A container according to claim 21,

said first body including a substantially cylindrical first sidewall and a substantially radially extending first end wall,

said second body including a substantially cylindrical second sidewall and a substantially radially extending second end wall.

23. A container according to claim 19,

said common lid including a generally cylindrical outer ring threadably coupled to each of the bodies and a generally disc-shaped cover plate extending radially inward from the outer ring and covering both openings.

24. A container according to claim 23,

said first and second bodies having substantially the same shape.

25. A method of removing food from a dual-compartment food storage container, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) uncovering a first container opening to thereby provide access to a first compartment of the container;

(b) inserting a first scooping element through the first container opening and into the first compartment;

(c) scooping food out of the first compartment using the first scooping element;

(d) uncovering a second container opening to thereby provide access to a second compartment of the container, said first and second container openings facing in generally opposite directions when covered;

(e) inserting the first scooping element or a second scooping element through the second container opening and into the second compartment;

(f) scooping food out of the second compartment using one of the scooping elements.

26. A method according to claim 25,

step (a) including unscrewing a first lid of the container,

step (d) including unscrewing a second lid of the container.

27. A method according to claim 25,

step (a) including unscrewing a first container body from a common lid,

step (d) including unscrewing a second container body from the common lid.

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