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(54) **CONTAINER FOR FOODSTUFFS**

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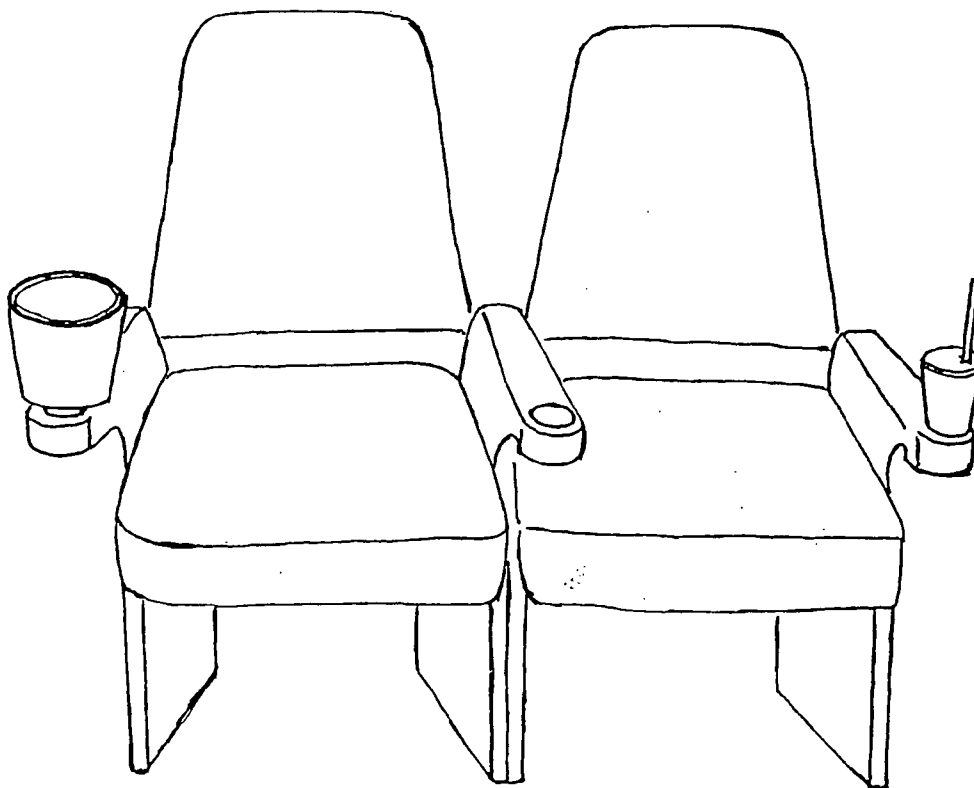
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A foodstuff container to be held in a cup receptacle of the armrest of a theater seat. The container has a large generally cylindrical popcorn-holding portion affixed to a base which is shaped on the outside the same as a conventional beverage cup.

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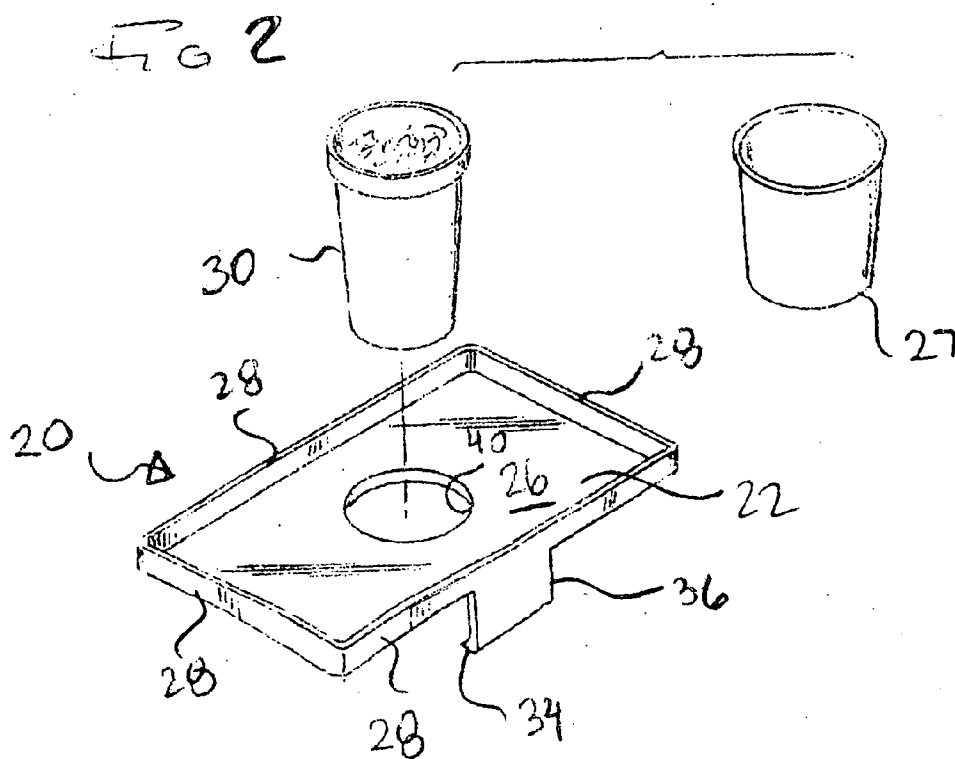
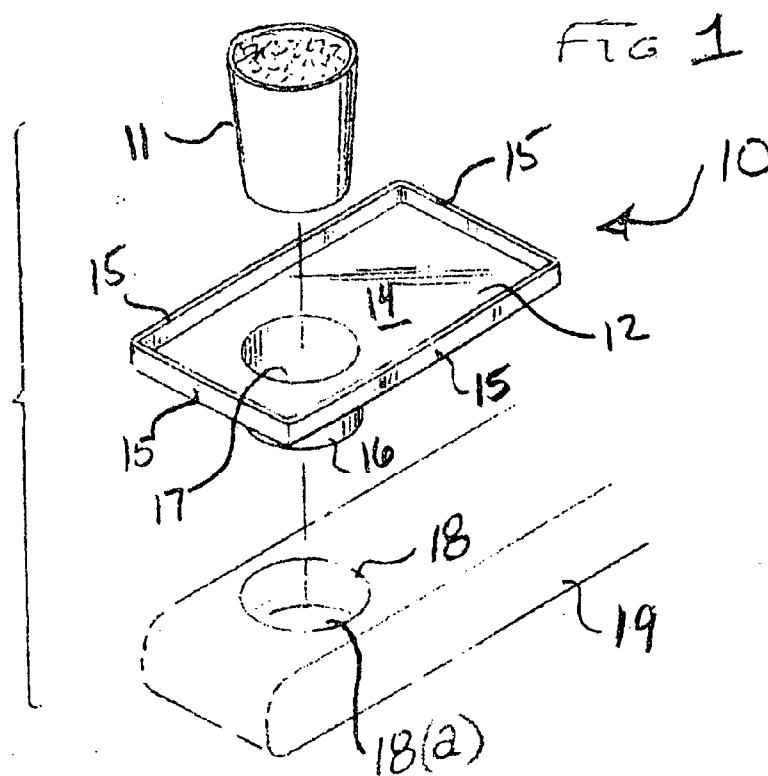


FIG 3

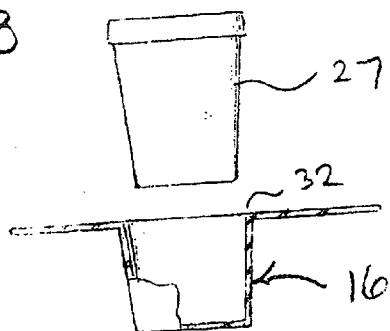


FIG 4

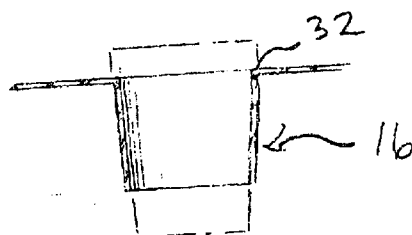


FIG 5

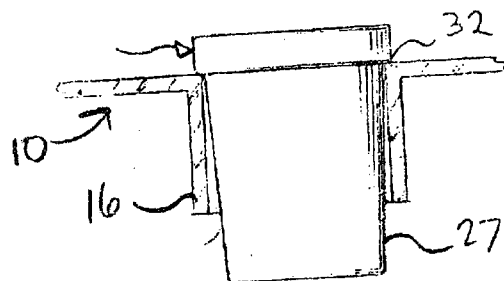


FIG 6

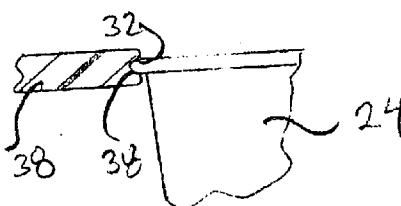


FIG 7

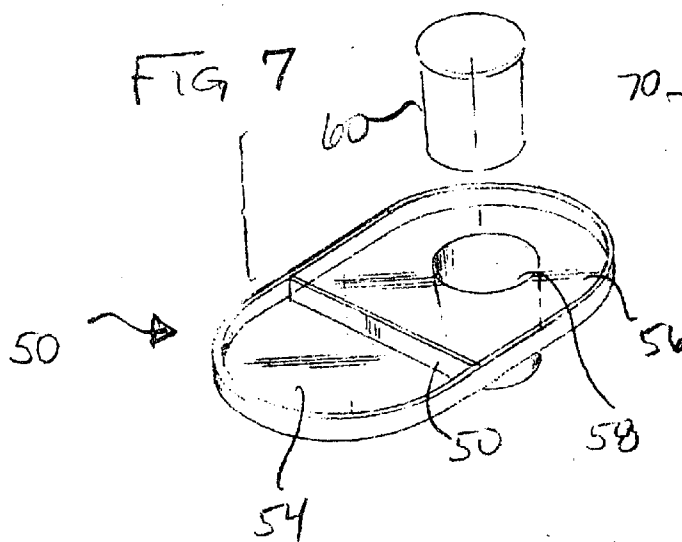
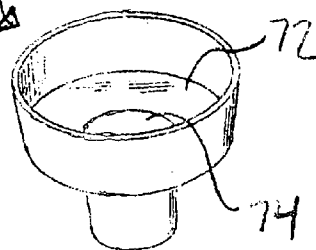
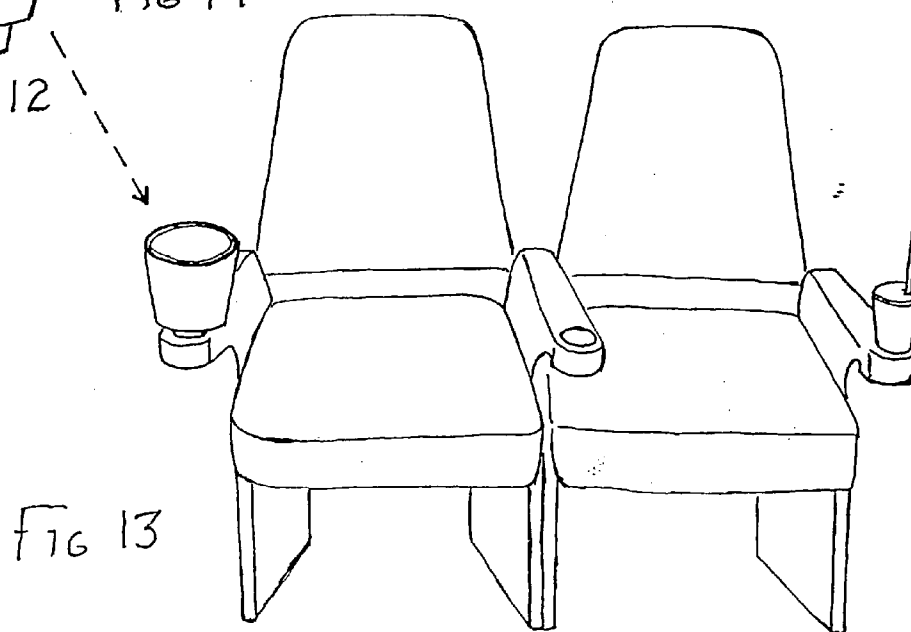
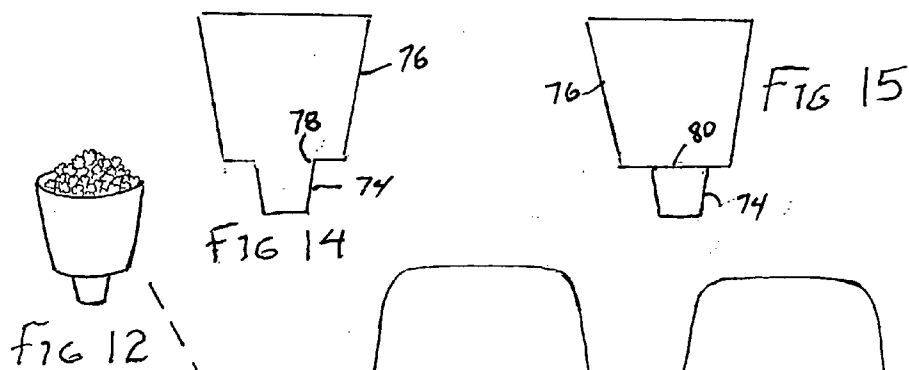
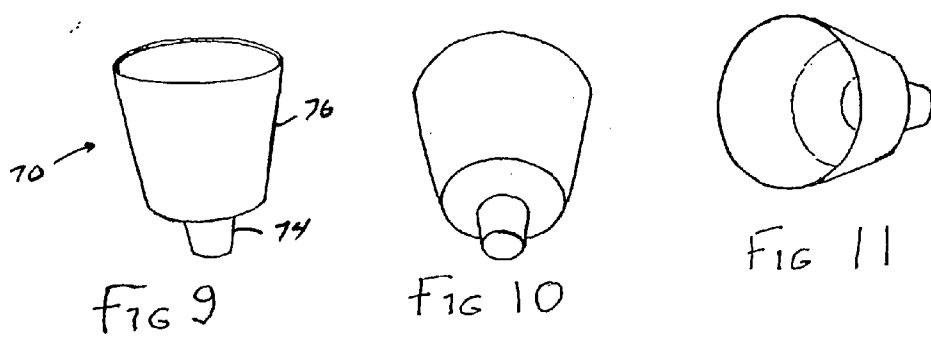


FIG 8





CONTAINER FOR FOODSTUFFS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of applicant's Ser. No. 10/452,325 filed Jun. 2, 2003.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to the field of apparatus for receiving foodstuffs for ready consumption, and more specifically, to an improved apparatus having a compound construction for enhanced capacity configured to be received in standard sized and shaped receptacles for receiving and supporting solid and liquid foodstuffs.

[0003] Popular culture virtually demands the convenience of food and drink holders in home, entertainment and mobile venues, to receive and support beverages within easy reach of the consumer. With respect to many entertainment venues such as movie theaters, theater owners and operators have sought both to please patrons and to increase revenue by selling various refreshments and snacks in addition to tickets. This includes drinks of various types and snacks such as popcorn. Commonly, such snacks are provided in a variety of containers, mostly large cups or boxes which are inconvenient to hold in the patron's lap. Most theater and many sports arenas have a receptacle holder, often referred to as a cup holder, in an armrest or other structure. Popcorn containers are far too large to be held in such cup holders. One method which allows larger containers to fit in standard vehicle container receptacles involves the use of an adapter. The adapter modifies the standard vehicle container receptacle to a size such that larger containers can be accommodated by the standard vehicle container receptacle. Dahlquist II et al, U.S. Pat. No. 4,854,468, shows a holder for a cup which holder has a lower portion which fits within a cup holder and a larger upper portion which holds a beverage cup having a diameter larger than the cup holder lower portion. Chandler, U.S. Pat. No. 5,088,673, discloses a container adapter device designed so that a standard vehicle container receptacle can accommodate containers that are too large to fit in the standard vehicle container receptacle.

[0004] Some cups are designed with a base proportioned to fit the standard vehicle container receptacle having a main body portion of a size larger than the base have attempted to overcome the problems of the limited container volume and top heaviness. However, these designs do not accommodate solid food stuffs in the manner described above.

[0005] Therefore, it is desirable to provide an improved food stuffs container that overcomes these prior art shortcomings. It should be noted and understood that with respect to the embodiments of the present invention disclosed herein, the materials, methods, apparatus and processes disclosed and suggested may be modified or substituted to achieve the desired protected structures without departing from the scope and spirit of the disclosed and claimed invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. 1 is a perspective exploded view of an assembly of the novel integrated apparatus of the present invention, configured to receive an optional beverage cup, further

configured to be secured to a cup holder provided in an arm rest such as an arm rest commonly found in many movie theaters, showing the walled tray structure supported by contiguously formed support base.

[0007] FIG. 2 is a perspective exploded view of another embodiment of the present invention, showing the assembly of the cup and walled tray components to be secured together for use, further showing a clip for securing the so-attached apparatus to the armrest or other structure to which the invention is to be received.

[0008] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of the present invention, shown further configured to receive a shaped container within the base recess, having a closed bottom.

[0009] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the present invention, showing a shaped container being fully inserted within the base recess, having an open bottom.

[0010] FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the present invention, showing the walled tray structure with a thicker supporting wall portions, further defining a shoulder for supporting a corresponding rim of a standard beverage container to be used therewith.

[0011] FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the present invention, showing a locking engagement between a rim portion of the base receptacle to be secured to with a corresponding rib-receiving structure provided in the floor of the walled tray structure to achieve the contiguous foodstuffs container of the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of another embodiment of the integrated foodstuffs container of the present invention, showing partitioned compartments for separating foodstuffs or other substances, and an optional container for being received within the contiguous base receptacle.

[0013] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of yet another embodiment of the integrated foodstuffs container of the present invention, showing a circular-shaped foodstuffs receiving volume of the walled tray portion contiguous with an integrally formed, coaxially aligned base receptacle.

[0014] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the popcorn holder of the present invention showing the front and top thereof.

[0015] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the popcorn holder of the present invention showing the front and bottom thereof.

[0016] FIG. 11 is a perspective view of the popcorn holder of the present invention showing the top and interior thereof.

[0017] FIG. 12 is a perspective view thereof filled with popcorn.

[0018] FIG. 13 is a perspective view of a pair of theater seats showing cup receptacles in the armrests thereof and one of which is holding the popcorn holder of the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional view of a first embodiment thereof.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] The detailed description as set forth below in connection with the appended drawings is intended as a

description of the presently preferred embodiments of the present invention, and is not intended to represent the only form(s) in which the present invention may be constructed or utilized. The description sets forth functions and sequence of steps for constructing, using, displaying, packaging, or using the invention in connection with the illustrated embodiments. It is understood, however, the same or equivalent functions and structures may be accomplished by different embodiments and that they are also intended to be encompassed within the spirit and scope of this invention.

[0021] With reference now to the drawing figures, FIG. 1 shows the integrated foodstuffs apparatus 10 of the present invention, having a walled tray portion 12 including a floor 14 bounded by walls 15 to form a relatively wide, open-topped receptacle. According to this embodiment, an open support base 16 is secured to and extends from the underside of the floor 14 at an opening 17 thereto to provide a contiguous volume there between, the recess of the support base 16 being readily accessed from the walled tray portion 12. The support base 16 is sized and shaped to be readily accommodated by a cup holder 18 provided in an armrest 19 of a theater chair (not shown) or other so-configured receptacle-receiving structure. It will be appreciated that the bottom of the cup holder 18 may be open or alternatively be provided with a floor 18(a). Likewise, the underside of the floor 14 of walled tray structure 15 may be planar, and may be provided with extended tray and floor portions intended to provide additional stability in the lengthwise direction of the armrest 19, thereby providing additional foodstuffs receiving space without encroaching on available seating areas to either lateral side of the armrest 19. Optionally, a container 11 may be received within the opening 17 of the apparatus 10, as necessary and desired to contain and make readily available additional foodstuffs or articles.

[0022] As will be appreciated, opening 17 is configured to correspond with cup holders having a relatively standard size recess such as that commonly provided in armrests of many theater chairs so as to hold the container while the patron is not eating or optionally, drinking from the cup. Accordingly, recess 17 may be either open or closed, but according to either embodiment, is readily received within cup holder 18 in the manner previously described. It will be further appreciated that the walled tray structure 12 is fabricated of a strong, moisture-proof but lightweight material, preferably such as injection molded plastic such as ABS, at low cost so as to be disposable after usage. However, other materials, such as fiberboard, corrugated cardboard or other paper-based materials of construction may be used to provide the desired low cost, lightweight, disposable features. As previously described walls 15 may be configured with a desired height to meet the needs of a particular food service, lower for relatively flat foods such as pizza, and higher for low bulk, high volume foods such as chips and popcorn. Whatever the selected wall height, the walls are canted at cooperative angles to be nestingly stacked for maximum efficiency in storage and shipping.

[0023] With reference now to FIGS. 2-6, various views of another embodiment of the inventive apparatus 20 are shown, all representing a readily assembled embodiments of the walled tray portion 22 and cooperating support base 24. Walled tray portion 22 including floor 26 is bounded by walls 28 to form a relatively wide, open-topped receptacle in the manner described with apparatus 10. According to this

embodiment, the container base 30 is separately provided, to aid in manufacturing, shipping, and storage. The container base 30 may utilize commonly available beverage containers having a standard sized rim for being readily engaged with a snap fit with a corresponding opening 32 formed in the floor of the walled tray, either with a snap lock fit (FIG. 6), interference fit (FIG. 4), or nesting engagement fit (FIG. 5). Accordingly, walled tray portions 22 may be separated provided, shipped and stored, for use in conjunction with standard beverage receptacles in the manner described above.

[0024] Again referring to FIG. 2, an additional container 27 may be utilized in connection with or in addition to the assembly 20 of the invention. Further more, the assembly 20 may be further secured to the armrest 19 with additional supports as desired, such as angle clip 34 extending from angle bracket 36 as will be appreciated by the skilled artisan, thereby further helping to assure against unintended spillage and resulting loss and soil.

[0025] Referring now to FIG. 6, it will be appreciated that support base 24 may be provided by a rimmed beverage container 36 having a shaped or rolled rim 38, and that feature standard to most beverage containers is advantageously exploited by providing a cooperative annular groove 32 within the opening 40 (FIG. 2) provided in floor 26. Accordingly, the refreshment vendor need merely align the rim 38 with the opening 40 and assemble the two together with a snap fit to achieve the functional equivalent of the structure 10 shown in FIG. 1.

[0026] With reference now to FIG. 7, it will be seen that a further embodiment 50 of the present invention provides at least one partition 52 to section off separate food receiving areas 54, 56, with the base portion 58 (integral or separate) contiguously formed with one of the areas 54, 56. Although this embodiment shows a side-by-side arrangement, it will be apparent to the skilled artisan that alternative arrangements may be achieved, including arced or concentrically zoned areas. No matter that embodiment, an optional container 60 may be received in base portion in the manner previously described.

[0027] With reference now to FIG. 8, it will be seen that a yet further embodiment 70 may include a generally circular walled tray portion 72, with a concentric base portion 74 integrally or affixable thereto in the manner described above.

[0028] The foodstuff container 70 is preferably used for popcorn which requires a far greater interior volume than a drink container. As shown in FIGS. 9-11, the container portion 76 is frusto conical but it may alternatively be cylindrical.

[0029] FIG. 14 shows a cross-sectional view where the concentric base portion 74 is open at the top 78 thereof. Preferably the concentric base portion 74 is closed at the top 80. This prevents popcorn from entering the interior of base portion 74 which is too small for the patron's fingers to grasp the popcorn. While the term "popcorn" is used herein, it is intended to include other light, particulate foodstuffs.

[0030] It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the embodiments described above, but encompasses any and all embodiments within the spirit and scope of the following claims.

I claim:

1. A popcorn holder for use in conjunction with a cup holder recess comprising:

a frusto-conical or cylindrical container having an open top and a diameter of at least 6 inches and a closed bottom;

a concentric base portion attached to the closed portion of the container, said base portion having a diameter adapted to be held in the cup holder recess.

2. A solid foodstuff holder for use in conjunction with a cup holder recess in the arm of a chair comprising:

a frusto-conical or cylindrical container of at least 6 inches in diameter having an open top, closed side walls and a bottom which is closed except for a central opening surrounding a concentric base portion extending downwardly from said bottom, said concentric base portion having an open top and a closed bottom and having dimensions adapted to be held in said cup holder.

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