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Schmelzer

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[54] **COOLER HAVING APPARATUS FOR SELECTIVELY STORING OR DEPLOYING TRAYS**

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** **312/282;** 312/236; 312/241; 312/281

[51] **Int. Cl.** **A47b 77/10**

[58] **Field of Search** 312/281; 108/25, 26, 44, 108/65, 66, 91, 152

[56] **References Cited**

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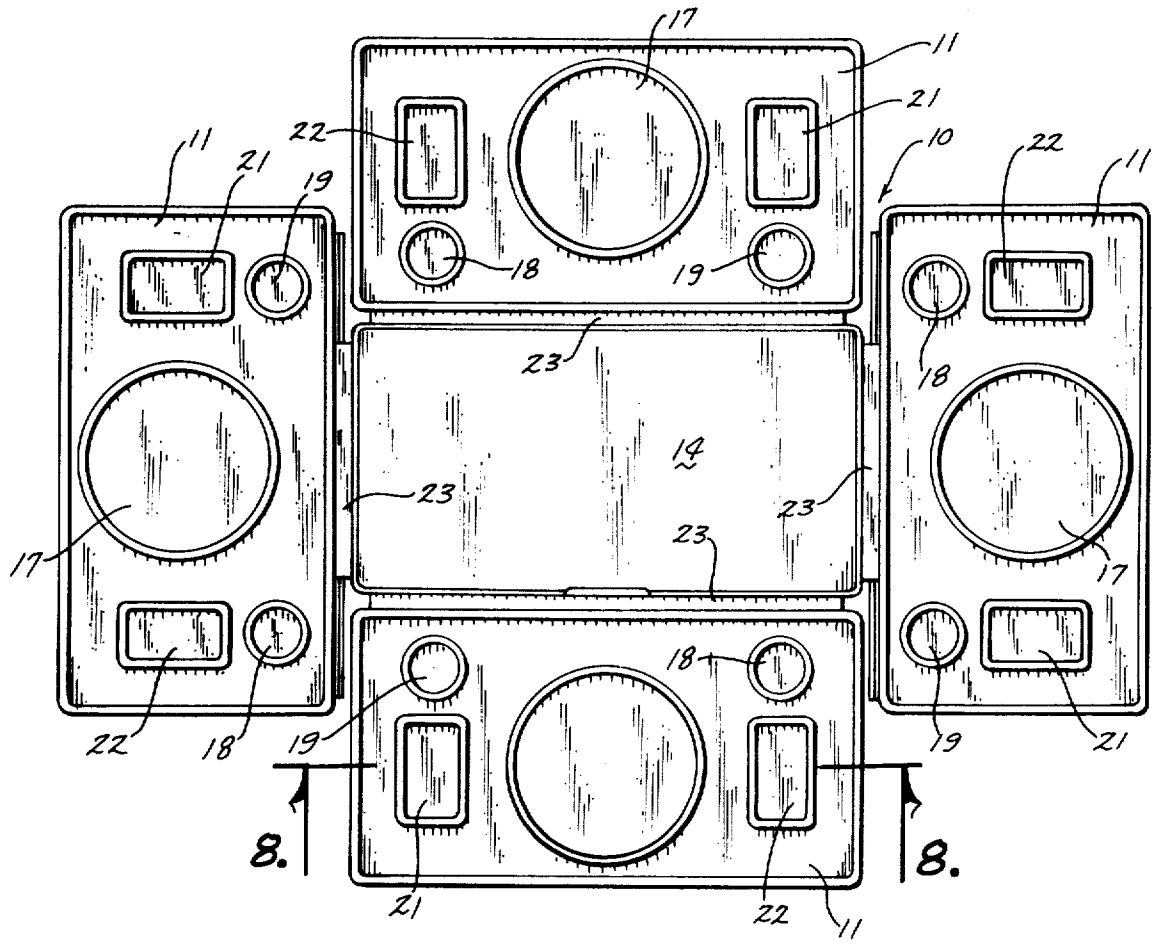
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[57] **ABSTRACT**

An ice chest or cooler for keeping foods and drinks cold having an insulated container body and an insulated lid therefor. A plurality of trays are selectively stored on the lid, or connected to the sides of the cooler for use. A novel arrangement is used to strap the trays in a stacked fashion on the lid. A novel structure is also used to connect the trays to the sides of the cooler for use. Storage compartments are provided for the tray-supporting structure, for eating utensils and for storing cups or glasses.

8 Claims, 9 Drawing Figures



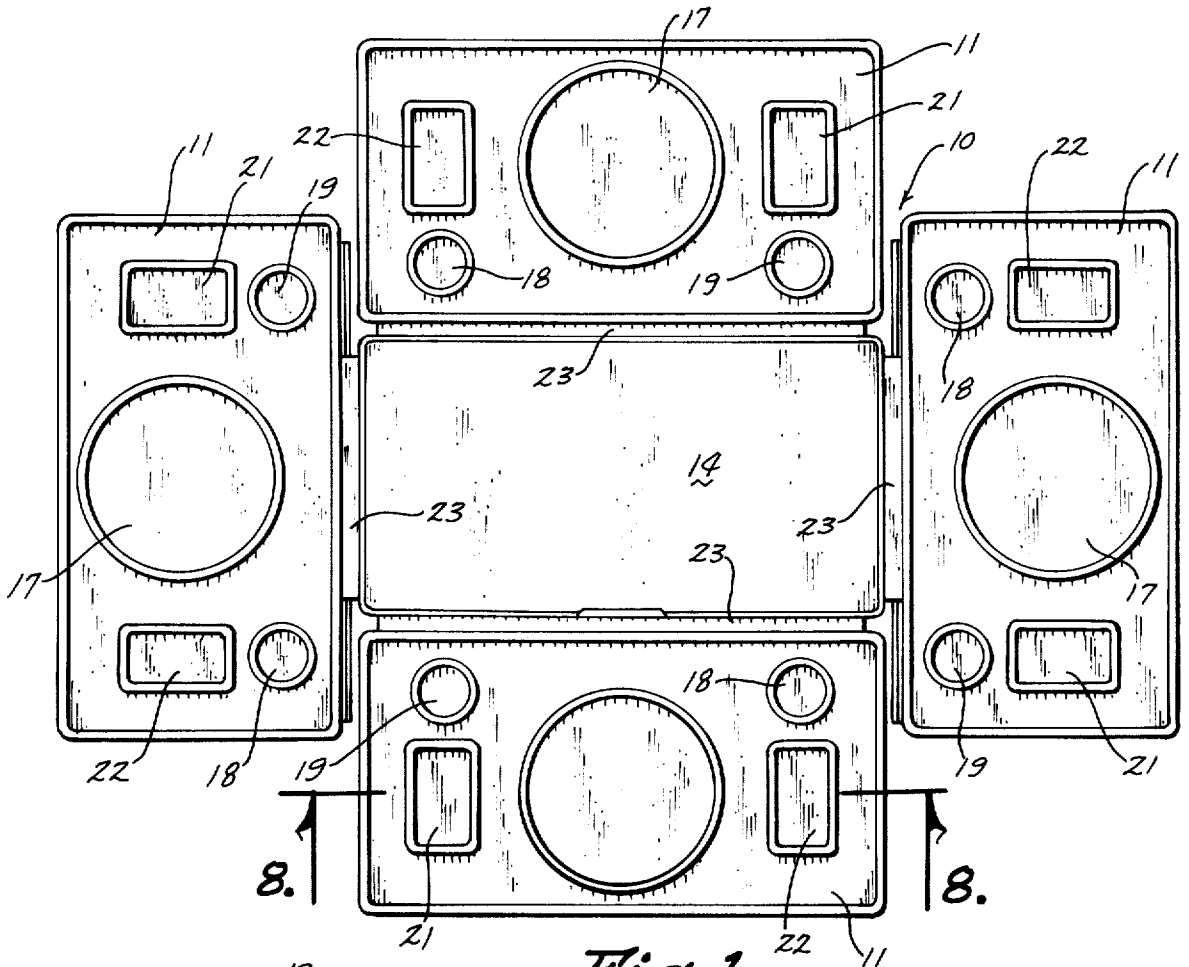


Fig. 1

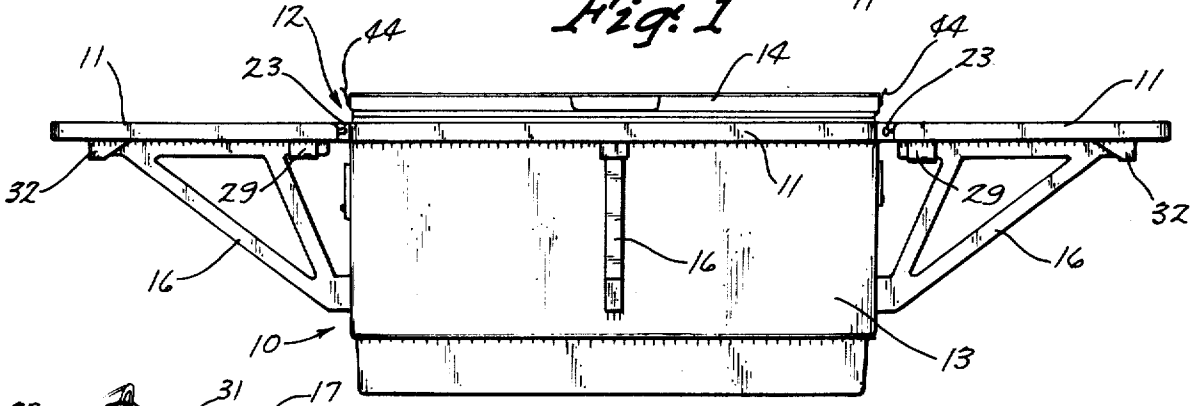


Fig. 2

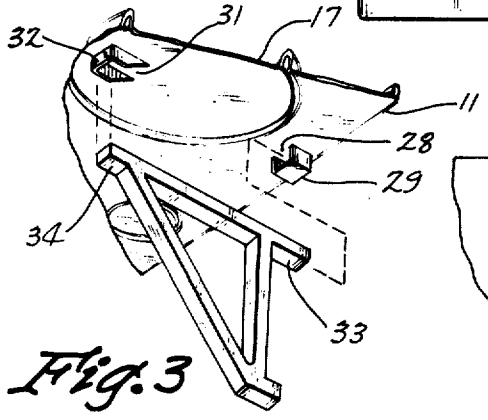


Fig. 3

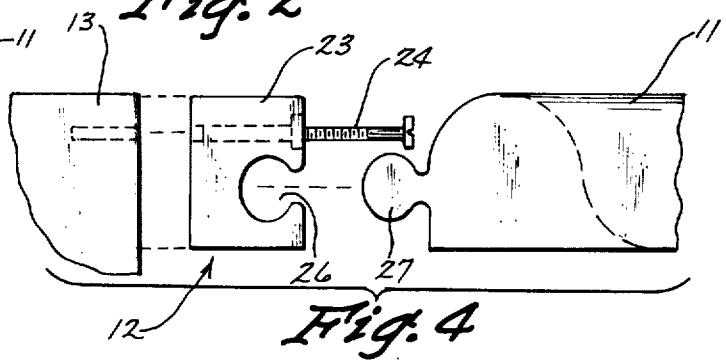


Fig. 4

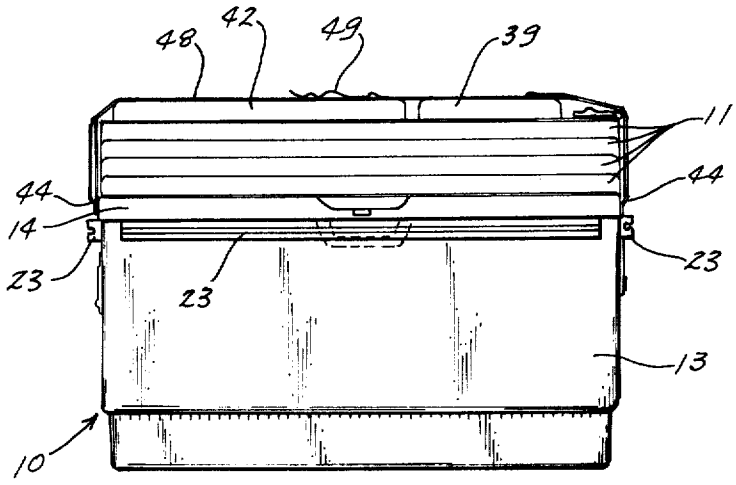


Fig. 5

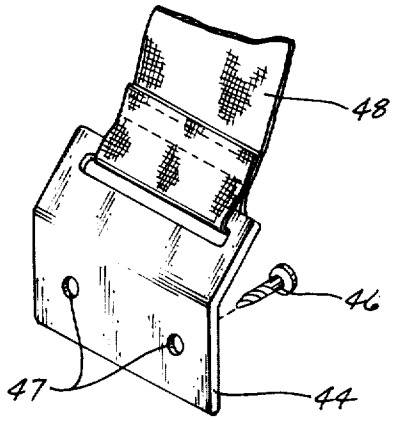


Fig. 6

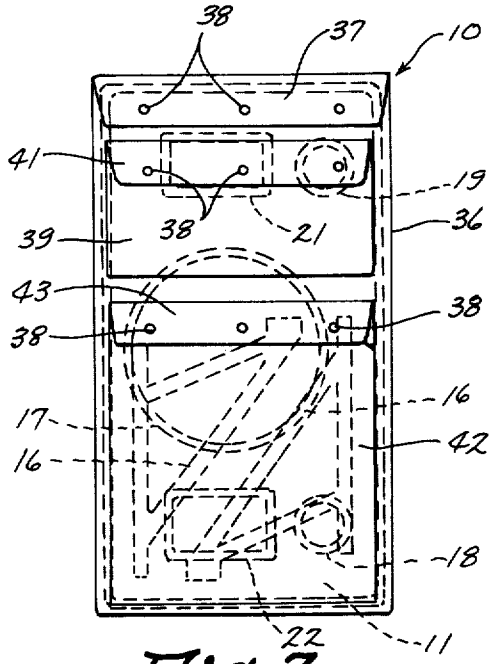


Fig. 7

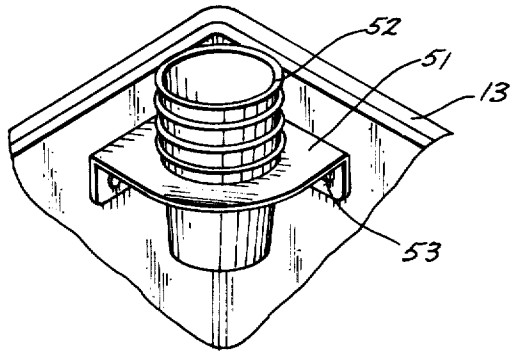


Fig. 9

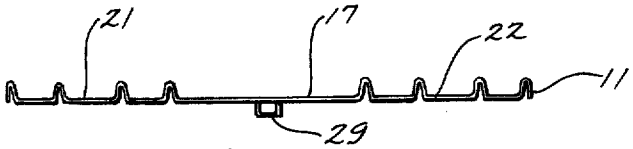


Fig. 8

COOLER HAVING APPARATUS FOR SELECTIVELY STORING OR DEPLOYING TRAYS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to coolers for picnicking and the like, and more particularly to an ice chest having trays which are selectively stored or used.

The main problem in picnicking or the like is the one of striking a satisfactory balance between having all of the conveniences that are desired on such an outing without the problem of having so much equipment that it would be impractical or unpleasant to transport this equipment to the outing site.

For most people who go on outings of this type having cold drinks along is a luxury to which they have become accustomed. Because of the development of ice filled coolers, the cooler has practically replaced the old fashion picnic basket because of this facility to keep drinks cold and to preserve food. With a container such as a picnic basket it was, however, possible to place a table or ground cloth such as a blanket therein, and to store the needed utensils such as knives, forks, spoons, paper plates, and paper cups in a picnic basket without subjecting them to the moisture present in an ice chest. This moisture can, of course, be damaging to these items. Consequently, in order to have the best of both worlds it has been necessary for modern picnic goers to take both a cooler and some other container such as a picnic basket to carry the other needed items.

Another problem is encountered if the outing scene does not include picnic tables or a surface from which to eat. Typically, in the absence of a picnic table or the like, ground cloths or blankets are spread and the picnic proceeds by having the participants hold their own plates while eating, or being forced to set the plates, cups, etc. on the ground or ground cloth. Additionally, this normal picnic arrangement requires an extensive amount of space, and, irrespective of the placement of the cooler with respect to the picnic participants, normally renders the cooler inaccesible or inconveniently located to at least some of these people. If the picnic is on a small boat or the like, this inconvenience is amplified.

While using trays on a picnic would be more convenient than not, they are rarely used because it means an additional bulky item to transport; and the problem of how to hold the tray or where to set it when eating therefrom still remains. For this reason, trays are usually not seen at a picnic.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an ice chest or cooler which has trays thereon which are selectively stored for transportation by a novel stacking and fastening arrangement on the lid thereof, or used, by being attached to the sides of the ice chest or cooled by a novel connection structure.

An object of the present invention is to provide a satisfactory substitute for a portable picnic table in combination with a cooler.

Another object of the invention is to provide a picnic tray system which allows simultaneous access to a cooler or ice chest.

A further object of the invention is to provide an ice chest with trays thereon which are selectively stored or used.

Still another object of the invention is to provide a lightweight and compact storage compartment in association with an ice chest or cooler.

Other objects, advantages, and novel features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a top plan view of the cooler of the present invention with the trays deployed for used;

FIG. 2 is a side elevational view of the ice chest with the trays deployed for use;

FIG. 3 is an exploded view of the bracing structure and the bottom of the tray which cooperates therewith;

FIG. 4 is an exploded view of the connection of the ice chest to one edge of a tray;

FIG. 5 is a side elevational view of the ice chest with the trays in the storage position;

FIG. 6 shows the connection structure of the tie-down strap to the lid of the cooler;

FIG. 7 is a top plan view of the ice chest invention with the trays in a storage position as shown in FIG. 5, but without the strap device being fastened;

FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of tray 11 taken along line 8—8 of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the cup holder of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate identical or corresponding parts throughout the several views, and more particularly to FIG. 1 which shows the general combination of a cooler 10 and trays 11 in the deployed position. FIG. 2 shows the connection arrangement 12 of the trays 11 to the container or body 13 of the ice chest. The top or lid 14 can be in the open or closed position while the trays are so disposed, or when the trays are in the storage position. Braces 16 serve to stabilize the trays 11.

The trays 11 have indentations therein which can best be seen in FIGS. 1 and 8. A central depression 17 is larger than the other depressions and is for a paper plate or the like. Similarly, indentations 18 and 19 can be used for cups or the like. Indentations 21 and 22 are designed for side dishes, such as potato chips or jello, but it will be understood that the depressions canbe interchangeably used for different types of food or drink as desired.

FIG. 4 shows a strip 23, one of which is attached to each side and the ends of the ice chest body 13 by a plurality of sheet metal screws 24. A groove 26 is disposed in the strip 23 for receiving an elongated protuberance 27 on each tray 11. Additionally, the brace member 16 is received in an opening 28 formed by a bracket 29 (FIGS. 2 and 3) on the bottom of tray 11. Another opening 31 is formed by an inverted scoop shaped member 32 on the bottom of tray 11 and is located at a position remote from bradket 29 to thereby stabilize the tray 11.

To utilize the trays 11, the brace 16 may be placed upon the bottom of tray 11 either before or after the protuberance 27 is placed into the groove 26. Preferably, the protuberance 27 is slid into the groove 26 from the side thereof first, and the brace 16 is then put in

place thereafter. Alternatively, the strips **23** and/or the trays can be made of a resilient material such as polyethylene plastic such that the protuberance **27** can be squeezed into the groove **26** by deforming either the protuberance **27** or the edges of the groove **26**, or both, so as to form a snap fit. In placing the brace **16** on the tray **11**, an extension **33** of brace **16** (FIG. **3**) extends into the opening **28**, and an extension **34** of the brace **16** extends into the inverted scoop shaped member. The bottom of brace **16** abuts the sides or ends of the cooler body **13**.

In order to store the trays **11**, they are stacked with the top side down as shown in FIG. **5**. Then they are placed in a compartment **36**, which may be made of any suitable material such as cloth or canvas, with a flap **37** having snaps **38** thereon. Compartment **37** serves to keep the trays clean and free from dust and other particles in the air which might render them unsanitary. A second compartment **39** is attached to the first compartment **36**, and is to be utilized for storing eating utensils. As in the first compartment **36**, second compartment **39** has a flap member **41** with snaps **38** thereon. A third compartment **42** is also attached to the first compartment **36**, and is for storing the braces **16**, when these braces are not in use. Compartment **42** has a similar flap **43** which is selectively closed by snaps **38**.

The trays **11** and the first, second and third compartments **36**, **39** and **42** are placed upon the lid **14** for storage and transportation as seen in FIG. **5**. Brackets **44** are fastened to the lid **14** by screws **46**, which pass through openings **47** in the bracket **44**. The strap **48** (FIGS. **5** and **6**) is preferably made of a nylon cloth and has a buckle **49** (FIG. **5**) which is utilized to securely fasten the trays and compartments to the lid of the cooler **10**. Because of this arrangement, the lid may still be opened either with or without the trays stacked thereon, and whether or not the trays are deployed for use around the cooler as shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

Also, on the inside of one of the back corners of the cooler is disposed a cup holder bracket **51**, for holding stacks of cups **52**. This cup holder bracket **51** may be attached to the inside walls of the ice chest in any suitable fashion, such as by screws **53**.

It can therefore be seen that the instant invention provides an extremely versatile and compact recreational device. Besides the fact that it can be used as any ordinary cooler can be used, it can also be seen that people can conveniently carry everything needed for a modern picnic outing in one light and compact device. Four people can have individual trays **11** from which to dine (FIGS. **1** and **2**) or a larger number of people can use the trays as a table-like surface. Cooler top **14** may also be used as a table-like surface, and additionally, it can be closed and yet be available to allow immediate access to the inside of the cooler body or container **13**. In this way, food and drink may remain in the cooler longer and thereby kept cold until the actual time that it is needed. Also, the people dining under this arrangement do not need to have any special balancing skills, because of the fact that the trays are readily fastened to the cooler. In this way, the instant invention serves to replace a table, so that people sitting therearound have an elevated surface from which to dine. In a limited recreational setting such as on a small boat, it can be readily seen that space is conserved and convenience is enhanced.

Obviously many modifications and variations of the present ivention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

I claim:

1. In an ice chest having an insulated container with a bottom, substantially planar sides, and an insulated lid for the container, and means for connecting the lid to the container for closing the container, the improvement comprising:

a plurality of trays having means to permit stacking of said trays relative to each other;

means for releasably holding said stacked trays on the lid of the container;

means for mounting said trays perpendicularly to the sides of said container, said mounting means comprising:

groove means laterally disposed along an outer surface of top edges of the substantially planar sides of said container and opening in a direction laterally outwardly with respect to the container;

protuberance means disposed on one edge of each of said trays for being selectively receivable in said groove means, said protuberance means being complimentary in shape with the groove means and being at least substantially as long in longitudinal length as the groove means, to provide lateral support thereof, said protuberance means further lying generally in a horizontal plane when said trays are in a horizontally deployed position;

brace means for engaging a portion of the sides of said container below the groove means and engaging a portion of each of said trays remote from said one edge of said trays;

a first opening in the bottom of each of said trays adjacent said one edge;

a projection means on said brace means for being selectively slideably received into and out from said first opening;

a second opening on the bottom of each of said trays remote from said first opening; and

a second projection means on said brace means for being selectively slideably received into and out from said second opening.

2. The device of claim **1** wherein said means for holding the trays comprises:

a releasable strap wrapped over the trays and connected at each end to the lid.

3. The device of claim **2** wherein said means for holding the trays further comprises a first compartment for holding said trays.

4. The device of claim wherein said first compartment has snap means for opening one end of said compartment.

5. The device of claim **4** wherein said first compartment has a second compartment connected thereto for holding eating utensils.

6. The device of claim **5** wherein said first compartment has a third compartment connected thereto for holding said brace means when the brace means are not in use.

7. The device of claim **6** wherein a cup holder means is attached to an upper inside corner of said container.

8. The device of claim **1** wherein said trays are of an identical shape and have depressions therein for holding plated and cups.

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