

Packaging and Cannabis Shelf Life

So, you have opened a new dispensary, and you wish to provide the best quality cannabis available, or you like to stockpile and buy some variety. The problem that you face now is that you don't necessarily know best practices regarding packaging.

Keeping all your packaging branded correctly is one thing, but choosing the correct packaging methods for your needs is a whole new ballgame. The question is whether one packaging method is better for your cannabis than another. The short answer is yes. However, it also depends on whether you are a seller or the client.

Why is the packaging so important?

If you think about how cannabis used to be sold (when it was still illegal), there wasn't much attention paid to the packaging except for making it as inconspicuous as possible.

However, since the legalization of cannabis, the packaging has become somewhat of a talking point, ranging from efficacy to health and safety regulations. If the food industry spends so much money on packaging, it would only be wise to apply the same mindset to cannabis, seeing that it is an organic substance prone to decay.

Cannabis packaging serves a threefold purpose namely, containment, protection, and communication. Investing in proper research and packaging techniques could greatly increase the quality of your product and the cannabis shelf life once bought.

Containment – This is the most basic function of packaging, yet it is also the most overlooked aspect. The obvious reason for containing cannabis is to move it from one place to another, without damaging the product.

Protection – Like any perishable substance, this is the most important reason why the cannabis needs to be packaged well. The product needs to be protected from foreign contaminants like water vapor, gases, odors, and liquids. The other heavyweight contaminant that causes degradation and spoilage is oxygen. In much the same way that it causes iron to rust, or when food compounds mix with oxygen and turns brown, so oxygen also oxidizes cannabis.

The only way to prevent this degradation is to replace the surrounding oxygen in the packaging with an inert gas like nitrogen. When cannabis mixes with oxygen, the THC cannabinoids turn to CBN cannabinoids. This degrades the quality and efficacy of the product. Lower levels of THC also reduce the potency of the product.

The process of replacing the oxygen in the packaging with an inert gas is called Modified atmosphere packaging and is worth investing in to ensure your products stay fresher for longer.

Communication – For sales purposes, packaging needs to send out a message of quality. At the same time, it also has to adhere to a number of regulations in order for it to be legal. It is the silent salesman which promotes brand loyalty.

What about the customer?

Not everyone has an extractor at home or a tank of nitrogen laying around to replace the oxygen in a pack. However, you don't need all of that if you intend to use your weed sooner rather than later. For your own purposes, however, it is wise to continue to store your weed in the ideal conditions.

There isn't much you can do about the oxygen after you have opened a sealed container, but you can ensure that it isn't exposed to unnecessary contaminants. It is then best to store your cannabis in a dark room that or at least out of direct sunlight. Another precaution to take is to store it away from the humid areas in your home.

When you store your cannabis, it is also a good idea to use glass containers. These containers need to be airtight and kept in a cool area. Glass is the ideal storage candidate because it is inert. It doesn't give off, nor absorb any flavors or odors. It is also impermeable which means your weed stays fresh for longer.

In the store

As mentioned, nitrogen flushing is the way to go if you want your cannabis to have a long and happy shelf life. The problem is that nitrogen flushing can be quite expensive and time-consuming. For this reason, the good old-fashioned vacuum packing method comes in handy. It also removes the oxygen which lowers the potency, but it doesn't protect the cannabis that well from bruising.

When your packaging is filled with nitrogen and sealed, it creates a protective barrier around the product due to the positive pressure inside the packaging. Like a packet of potato chips, the freshness stays inside while also preserving the shape of the flowers.

Some people might be put off by the aroma of marijuana, and this is where the nitrogen also masks the aroma. The nitrogen keeps the weed free from any moisture and thus prevents it from molding as well.

Unfortunately, nitrogen flushing also has a downside. Depending on the size of your establishment and the quantities of weed that you want to put on your shelf, you can expect to pay anything between \$5,000 and \$35,000 for a quality commercial nitrogen flushing and sealing unit. It is also a time-consuming task which adds a layer of management to your dispensary.

When you weigh the costs and compare the pros and cons of nitrogen flushing, you might come to the conclusion that nitrogen flushing isn't necessarily the right option for you. If you produce on a large enough scale that justifies the cost, then there isn't a better alternative. However, seeing that the time that marijuana stays on the shelf is relatively short, you can opt for more cost-effective ways of packaging.

The main factors that you need to keep in mind are to keep your products away from moisture, out of direct sunlight and in glass containers. This will ensure that you still deliver a quality product without having to spend all your profits on packaging to sustain cannabis shelf life. If you keep these factors in mind, you can safely keep your stock on your shelf for a year or two (not that it will ever stay that long).

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<https://cannacon.org/how-does-packaging-affect-cannabis-shelf-life/>