

The Best Refillable Propane Tank Options

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The green one-pound propane bottles we all use to feed our car-camping stoves are as ubiquitous in the outdoor world as leather hiking boots and two-pole dome tents, but they come with more than their fair share of problems. The biggest one? They're incredibly difficult to recycle, and like most single-use items, they only serve us for a short time before ending up in the landfill. You're probably familiar with the 20-pound propane tanks folks use to grill, which you can either take to get refilled or cheaply swap out for a fresh one. Why can't you do the same with the smaller, more portable options? For starters, it's dangerous to top off one-pound propane tanks that aren't specifically designed to be

refilled—also known as DOT 39 cylinders—as a result of their thinner walls. And if the threat of an exploding steel canister isn't enough to make you think twice, transporting refilled DOT 39 bottles can land you some major fines and even prison time, so steer clear. There are better alternatives out there. Consider one of these reusable tanks for your next camping trip.

Ignik Gas Growler Deluxe (\$150)



(Photo: Courtesy Ignik)

Ignik's five-pound tank hits a sweet spot between the one-pound cans that only last for a few days of cooking and the cumbersome 20-pounders. It's packed in a durable, easy-carrying canvas case as small as a stowed four-person backpacking tent, making it my favorite option for car camping. With five times the volume of the disposable canisters, it lasted for more than a week of breakfast and dinner stove use. A four-foot hose (which packs into the carrying case) connects it to all your standard propane appliances. You'll need to find a place that refills propane tanks, like a propane distributor or some gas stations. But a full recharge in Boulder, Colorado, only set me back \$5—just a buck or two more than the DOT 39 cylinders. The initial investment, even for the tank without the case (\$100), is disproportionately steep, though. Hardware stores often carry a selection of different-size tanks as well, which can be refilled and used in the same way as the Ignik. But for a durable, ready-to-use package, the Gas Growler Deluxe is worth the cash.

Flame King One-Pound Refillable Cylinder and Refill Kit (\$45)



(Photo: Courtesy Flame King)

Unlike most common one-pounders, this setup from Flame King is rated for refilling and perfect for those who require less gas. The kit comes with a stand to flip and elevate your 20-pound tank (which you'll use to refill the smaller one), an adapter, and the refillable bottle. The adapter is easy to use, and thanks to a valve of its own, it prevents the slow leaks that can occur with simpler devices. Plus, a bleeder hole in the bottle—not a feature you'll find on the disposable variety—means you can load up the bottle without fear of overfilling it or needing to weigh it. Follow directions, wear hand protection, and steer clear of any flames.

If that sounds like too much of a hassle, brands like Little Kamper are offering to swap out one-pound canisters (many of which are manufactured by Flame King) at a handful of California locations. Their exchanges typically cost between \$8 and \$9 per one-pound bottle. Sports Basement, a San Francisco Bay Area chain, sells Flame King bottles at cost, then refills them for free for members and for \$2 for nonmembers.

An Exchangeable 20-Pound Tank



(Photo: Courtesy Amazon)

For someone in search of the highest level of convenience and savings—especially vanlifers, longer-term car campers, and those with bigger rigs—who said you can't just tote along the 20-pounder living under your backyard grill? You'll have enough propane to last weeks, and it can simply be swapped out for a full tank at just about any grocery store or gas station for around \$20 (buying the tank generally costs around \$50). One common misconception with larger tanks is that you'll need a separate regulator to keep the flow of gas to a manageable level. Don't worry: these tanks have them built in.