

Grandpa's Pantry List

What's always on my shelf, and how I keep it

Come on in, young one. My grandmother down in the Delta kept a pantry that could carry a family through a hard winter, and I've kept mine the same way ever since I came up to Chicago. Here's what's always on my shelf and how I keep it, so nothing goes to waste. Check 'em off as you stock up.

I. Staples

- ☐ **Dry beans** — pick 'em over, soak 'em overnight. They keep about a year in a tight jar. Older beans just take longer to cook.
- ☐ **White rice** — in a tight jar on a cool, dry shelf it keeps a long, long while.
- ☐ **Flour** — in a tin with a good lid. Write the date on it when you fill it.
- ☐ **Cornmeal** — for cornbread and frying. If you won't use it up in a few months, keep it in the icebox.
- ☐ **Rolled oats** — a tight jar keeps the pantry moths out.
- ☐ **Sugar and salt** — keep 'em dry and they never go bad. A few grains of rice in the salt shaker keeps it from clumping.

II. Jars & Cans

- ☐ **Canned tomatoes** — oldest can to the front, newest to the back. A can that's bulging or leaking goes in the trash, no arguing.
- ☐ **Molasses or cane syrup** — keeps a long time. Wipe the rim before you close it so the lid don't stick.
- ☐ **Honey** — if it goes cloudy and thick, set the jar in warm water. It ain't spoiled.
- ☐ **Vinegar** — keeps near forever. Grandma cleaned her counters with it too.
- ☐ **Pickles** — once the jar's open, it lives in the icebox.
- ☐ **Bacon grease** — strained through a cloth into a jar and kept in the icebox. Grandma never wasted a drop.

III. Spices

- ☐ **Black pepper** — buy it whole and crack it as you go. Whole pepper keeps its bite a lot longer.
- ☐ **Cayenne and red pepper flakes** — in a cupboard, not on a shelf over the stove. Heat takes the flavor right out.
- ☐ **Bay leaves** — two in every pot of beans. Keep 'em dry in a jar.
- ☐ **Whole nutmeg** — grate just what you need; the rest keeps whole for a long time.
- ☐ **Dried herbs** — give the jar a sniff once a year. If it smells like nothing, it'll taste like nothing.

IV. Keeps in the Cool Dark

- ☐ **Potatoes** — cool, dark and dry, not the icebox. And not next to the onions.
- ☐ **Sweet potatoes** — same as their cousins: cool and dark, out of the icebox.
- ☐ **Onions** — in a basket or a mesh bag where the air can move.
- ☐ **Garlic** — whole heads in an open basket. Only break a head when you need it.
- ☐ **Cooking oil** — in a dark cupboard, cap on tight. If it smells like old crayons, it's turned.

Never in My Kitchen

- ✗ **Soda.** Water, coffee, tea. That's what we drink in this house.
- ✗ **Anything with a cartoon on the box.**
- ✗ **Bread that never goes stale.** Real bread goes hard in three days. Hard bread makes bread pudding and crumbs, so it still don't go to waste.

What's always on **YOUR** shelf, young one? Follow along and tell Papa in the comments.

— *Papa Ezra*

Papa Ezra is an AI-generated character. Kitchen stories and habits only — not medical or nutrition advice.