

# The *Well-Stocked* Pantry:

What to have on hand so you can make easy, tasty meals in minutes.

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Here's a master list of the items to have on hand so you can make easy, tasty meals in minutes. When you have a well-stocked pantry, you can let your creativity soar - or at least have the essentials on hand for trying out your next recipe.



- milk
- butter
- yogurt
- mayonnaise - or veganaise, if you prefer
- cheese - both sliced and bulk



- **Garlic** – Yes garlic is a veggie – unless it’s a dry powder, then it’s a spice, which I wouldn’t recommend. Not would I suggest garlic packed in oil – it has a funky odor. Stick to the fresh and chop it yourself and you can’t go wrong.)
- **Onions** – white, or yellow and sweet (Vidalia is the sweetest in season)
- **Mixed Greens** – Choose your favorite. There’s plenty of pre-washed, packaged varieties including many organic selections
- **Tomatoes** – slicing and/or plum, grape or cherry (they’re the little ones)
- **Peppers** – There’s too many varieties to list here but why not start with bell – yellow, red or orange are the sweetest – and a jalapeno add a bit of heat.
- **Potatoes** – Again, many varieties but start with an all purpose one such as Yukon Gold.
- **Carrots**
- **Celery**
- **Add your favorite vegetable** – broccoli, asparagus, string beans, it doesn’t matter. Just choose what you like and then you’ll want to cook it.



- **Flour** – Unbleached White, or all purpose gluten free
- **Sugar** – White for baking, brown, raw for sweetening your tea or coffee
- **Pasta** – It comes in many shapes, sizes and ingredients; wheat, rice, quinoa, spelt and more so you have plenty to choose from.
- **Rice** – Buy your favorite variety or start with a long grain white or brown rice. Don't buy the packaged, semi-prepared rice dishes such as pilaf or stir fried. They are loaded with preservatives and sodium. Remember you're cooking here – not throwing a bag into the microwave.
- **Quinoa** – A pasta like grain that's gluten-free and really healthy for you.
- **Chicken Broth** – boxed or canned
- **Canned Tomatoes** – Whole peeled or crushed (I'll explain later).
- **Olive Oil** – Pure olive oil for cooking and Extra Virgin for dressings.
- **Vegetable Oil** – for frying and baking
- **Balsamic Vinegar** – or red or white wine if you prefer
- **Breads** - Here you get to choose whatever you like but have some version of sliced as well as loaf bread. I would also add some type of wrap.
- **Honey** - Organic honey is a wonderful alternative to sugar and can be used as a sweetener for drinks and recipes that provides many health benefits that sugar does not. It is also valued for its medicinal uses since ancient times.



## HERBS & SPICES

When it comes to herbs and spices, I could tell you to go out and buy a whole bunch that would be interesting to smell and look at and most likely, most would remain, unused in a drawer, or worst – on a carousel (a shower gift) taking up valuable counter space.

Okay, so I'm not going to suggest you buy a bunch of spices – at least not right away. But if you ever happen to pass by a spice shop - the kind with rows and rows of big jars - walk in. It's a sensory and textural odyssey. To learn the secrets of both the art and science of these gems would take a lifetime of study – a journey I have barely dipped my toes in – a journey I doubt you want to take – unless you do. No. I'm not going to let all those powders in bright colors scare you. I promise.

Specifics depends of course on what you're making. I know that many people start off with a spice starter kit offering a small amount of a wide variety of herbs and spices but this is most often a waste.

In most spice collections (including my own) I find I usually use only a small portion. As a result, many end up getting thrown out from lack of use. I would therefore advise you to start with the very basics and then add what you need as you need it. This will prevent waste and allow you to build a useful collection over time.

But here's a starter at it's most very basic.

- **Salt** - Salt has come a long way from the basic table salt which should not be used because of the additives found in it. What you really need is two kinds.
- **Kosher Salt** – for general cooking. Course grain is best.
- **Sea Salt** – for finishing a dish. This has a softer (less salty) flavor and is a great table salt.

- **Black Pepper** – buy whole peppercorn (they last indefinitely) and can be ground as you need them.
- **Crushed Red Pepper Flakes** – for a little heat
- **Spice Medleys** – These are a mix of herbs and spices by cuisine. They make it easier to cook a particular cuisine such as Italian (a mix of thyme, marjoram, oregano, basil, etc) or Asian, Indian, French, Mexican etc. This will give you the flavors of the dish you're making without having to purchase each herb or spice individually.



- **Roasted Chicken** – A whole pre-roasted is the best because you can do so much with it on the fly.
- **Fish** – I won't add fish here since that's something you'll buy when you want to make it that night or the next day. It's not something to have on hand if you don't have specific plans to cook it. It'll stink up your refrigerator and you'll waste money on an expensive product.
- **Beans** – a great source of protein if you're a vegetarian (or not) and there's many varieties – all for pennies per serving. Personally I like lentils, split peas, and white cannellini beans. Garbanzo beans are great too but they take a really long time to cook.
- **And of course...Eggs** - Not only are they used in many recipes, eggs are once again considered the perfect food. When you have eggs in the house... you'll never go hungry



Knock yourself out here. Show your true colors. Get your favorite ketchup, mustards, relishes, spreads, but be careful here. Read the labels for preservatives and sodium content especially.

**And that's it. Not too bad or scary...right?**

# Creations from Your Well-Stocked Pantry

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Now what can we make from this list fast? The variations could be endless but here's a short list and the recipes to get you started. You'll get the hang of it sooner than you think. Just start.



This is great to always have on hand because it's perfect for so many quick dishes. Don't have to buy pre-made bottled sauces. They're far more expensive than a can of tomatoes and they tend to have a high sodium content. Truthfully, why buy pre-made when making a fresh sauce tastes better and is almost as easy as opening and heating the bottled sauce.

- 1 28 oz. can crushed tomatoes (one with no added garlic or herbs)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil (or enough to just cover the bottom of the pan)
- 1/4 cup chopped onions
- 1 clove fresh garlic—finely chopped
- 1 Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 sprig of fresh basil (one with multiple attached leaves) or parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste

Place a medium saucepan (2 – 4 quarts) over medium heat and add oil and onions. Cook for about 3 minutes or until the onions soften. Add the garlic and pepper flakes and cook for about 15 seconds, just until golden and immediately add the tomatoes (this will stop the garlic from continuing to cook and burn). Stir the sauce, add some salt and the fresh herbs. Keep the herbs whole so they can infuse the sauce with their goodness but that you'll easily be able to pull them out when the sauce is done (It gets slimy so you don't want to eat it). Bring to a boil then lower the heat to simmer and cook for about 30 minutes. And that's it. You're done.

**Now, here's what you can do with this delicious sauce:**



Simply follow the package directions, drain and toss with a bit of the sauce. Plate, top with more sauce and with slivered basil or chopped parsley.

Or for a quick variation, add capers, kalamata olives, and anchovies to the sauce and you'll have a delicious Italian classic...Putanesca sauce.



Add some of the sauce to a skillet placed over medium heat and crack two eggs into the pan as well. Season with salt and pepper and cover. Cook for about two minutes or until the white is cooked through and the yoke is to your liking. If the sauce gets dried out just add a few drops of water and stir.





### 3. TOMATO SOUP

Heat sauce and add chicken broth to it. Start with a cup of broth and keep adding more broth until it reaches the consistency and taste that you like.

In a separate pot cook pasta (small shapes or cut up long pasta) or quinoa, drain and add to the broth. Top with fresh basil and parmesan if you like.



### 4. PIZZA

Make your own dough if you like - you'll find my easy recipe below. You can also buy ready-made dough. Top with sauce, and your choice of toppings.

- 1 cup warm water (105°F to 115°F)
- 1 envelope active dry yeast
- 3 cups all purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Mix water and yeast in a small bowl. Let stand until yeast dissolves, about 5 minutes. In a large mixing bowl add 2 3/4 flour (set the rest aside), sugar, and salt. Add yeast mixture and olive oil. Mix with your hands until dough forms a sticky ball. Add more flour (a bit at a time) and knead dough until smooth. Coat the dough with a bit of oil. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let dough rise in warm place until doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

Punch down dough and roll into a thin circle. Place on a baking sheet or pizza stone and bake at 475 degrees for about 2 minutes or just until the crust begins to form. Add your toppings and bake until the crust is golden, about 10 minutes.



Make pesto and mix it with it with the marinara sauce recipe (above) and you'll have another simple but intensely flavorful pasta sauce.

Okay, you do need a food processor for this or a mortar and pestle (and using it to make pesto is beyond cooking basics...so buy it ready made). But if you have or can borrow a food processor, making pesto is easy, fun, smells great and you can freeze it.

The best time to make pesto is in the summer, when herbs are at their best. The most popular pesto is made with basil but I personally like combining basil with parsley because it's milder. But, really, you can make pesto from almost any herb. Another of my personal favorites is basil/parsley/tarragon which has a mild licorice flavor.

Pesto has 5 main ingredients: olive oil, herbs, pine nuts (though prices of pine nuts have gone through the roof so feel free to substitute another nut such as walnuts) parmesan and garlic. You put everything but the oil in the food processor, turn it on and add the oil slowly and voila! But here's the exact recipe:

- 1 cup fresh basil leaves (stems removed)
- 1 cup fresh flat leaf parsley (stems removed)
- 1 large fresh garlic clove
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan (or pecorino romano)
- 1/4 cup walnuts (shells removed)
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste

Add all but the olive oil in the bowl of a food processor. Turn it on and process until the ingredients form a thick paste. With the blade spinning pour in the oil until the pesto loosens and is the consistency you like. Season with salt and pepper. Add more oil and or parmesan if you like.

*You're cooking!* Give yourself a cheer and just keep cooking. Remember, all cooks make mistakes. And it's really no big deal. Just figure out what went wrong and start again...good advice for other, more important life lessons.

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