



Top Ten Pantry Items

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A smartly stocked pantry allows you the ability to whip up meals without much planning on any given night, add some excitement to standard recipes or just make a quick snack in between meals. Assuming every keeps salt and pepper on hand, below is what we believe to be the top ten essential items everyone should have in their cupboard...

1. **A Spice Blend** – choose one depending on what you like or try a new one each month but whether it's Herbs de Provence, Garam Masala, Creole Seasoning or Italian herbs, having one of these in the cupboard allows you to add instant excitement to any dish and since these are blends of six to ten different spices you don't need to have containers of all those different spices taking up all that room.
2. **Onion Powder and Garlic Powder** – so many dishes start out with onions and garlic, but keeping the fresh ones around can be a challenge. Although not as good, these two powders get you pretty close to the real thing.
3. **Honey** – vinaigrettes, stocks, soups, stews...they all can benefit from a little bit of sweetness to balance them out. You could just keep sugar on hand but honey provides an added complexity to foods and since it is the only natural product that never goes bad, it is perfect for the pantry!
4. **Extra Virgin Olive Oil** – we pour this on everything! Although it's not the ideal oil to cook with, buying a price conscious brand like our local Pompeian makes you feel good about it. So, drizzle it on bread, tomatoes, cheeses and salads or sauté anything you have in the fridge to make a quick meal.
5. **Dried Pasta** – one big and one small...pasta is the perfect foil for anything you have left in the fridge; chop it up, sauté it up and toss with cooked pasta...easy meal! For the big version we prefer Bucatini or Penne, for the little version, it is hard to beat the delicious taste and texture of Israeli Couscous.
6. **Yellow Cornmeal** – maybe you're not always in the mood for pasta but still need to get rid of some leftovers in the fridge; making a batch of polenta can



fix that easily. But cornmeal has so many other uses...make a batch of skillet cornbread, cornmeal crust and fry anything from oysters to chicken to onion rings or make a warming Indian pudding with honey for dessert.

7. **Balsamic Vinegar** – vinegars in general are good things to have in the pantry but Balsamic vinegar is the king of them all...it can add complexity to sauces, makes the perfect vinaigrette and can even be reduced to a syrup to be served with fruit and whipped cream for dessert.
8. **Dijon Mustard** – besides the fact that it just tastes great on everything, Dijon's acidic, sharp taste adds great flavor to so many things. Start with the simple Honey & Dijon Mustard Vinaigrette then move onto using it to glaze hams, adding it to pan sauces, mixing it into your potato dishes and rubbing it on lamb as the 'glue' to hold on your herb crust.
9. **Canned Fish or Chicken** – use these in a pinch to add protein to a great salad or pasta, mold them into a cake, purée them to make a dip or mix them with some simple ingredients for a great sandwich. Canned tuna is the obvious choice and certainly a good one but there's lots of room to be adventurous... some of our favorites are Double 'Q' Wild Caught Alaskan Salmon, and Trader Joe's has a great proprietary smoked canned trout.
10. **Your Favorite Hot Sauce** – whether it's Tabasco or Sriracha or Louisiana Crystal, there's always the need to provide some real heat to certain dishes. Certainly these spicy concoctions are great just on lots of foods but they provide heat to sauces where pepper just won't work; Hollandaise, Cheese Sauces, Béchamel, etc. We also like to stir them into mashed potatoes to give them a kick, add them into all types of marinades and of course, liven up your Bloody Mary.

AND A FEW MORE... Your favorite canned beans, canned whole tomatoes or a just some cans of Rotel with diced tomatoes, onions & peppers. If you are not a fan of pasta you can certainly create a great "Pantry Rice Dish". Soy sauce, sesame oil, & Rice Wine Vinegar also come in very handy when flavoring dishes.