

# How To Build Up Your Food Reserves For Everyday Use

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Having a stockpile of food on hand for emergencies is essential. But, it's not the only step to ensuring your family can eat [if a food crisis arises](#).

You also need a pantry of food reserves intended for everyday use.

What's the Difference Between a Pantry of Food Reserves and a Food Stockpile?

Some preppers might use the terms food reserves and food stockpile interchangeably, but in my mind they're different. Let me explain.

My food stockpile consists of much food designed for [emergency rations](#). It's long lasting, and stored securely out of the way of pests. Some is packed in go bags, or directly in the car.

This stockpile is food that I know the family will eat, but it's not something we eat all the time. Food in my stockpile typically costs more than I'm willing to spend on food for daily consumption. It's truly for emergencies.

Conversely, my food reserves are in the kitchen pantry cupboards, ready to feed my family on a daily basis. They're canned good, shelf-stable staples, and other items that we use routinely. They even include items in my fridge and freezer—things we use frequently.

My reserves aren't stored to last for decades, because I plan on using them up well before then. It's food that's needed to create the meals on my annual meal plan.

These reserves are more short-term than long-term. They're how I fight back against rising food prices, and save gas by not having to constantly drive an hour to the store. It's how I can throw together quick meals to avoid the expense of going out to eat.

As long as my pantry is stocked, I don't ever have to worry about my family going hungry.

## How to Begin Building a Pantry

If you currently don't have a lot of food on hand, the idea of creating a well-stocked pantry may be overwhelming. But, by taking it one baby step at a time, you can get to the point where you don't have to go to the store every week. You may even stop going to the store for a couple months at a time.

Sit down for a bit and think. You're going to want notes, so grab a piece of paper, your favorite notes app on your phone, or your computer. Once you're ready, here's what I want you to think about.

### 1. What Does a Typical Day's Food Look Like in Your Home?

Are you currently cooking three meals a day from scratch? Are the kids eating lunch at school while you're going out to eat? Does dinner come in a box?

There are no right or wrong answers right now, so answer honestly. What does your family eat in a

typical day?

If you aren't sure, you might need to spend a day creating a simple food journal. Just write down everything you eat all day long. Indicate if your family members joined you, or if you were on your own.

Once you have a general idea of what your family eats in a day, it's time to do some analyzing.

## 2. How Much of that Food Was in Your Pantry?

Look over the list of consumed foods. Put a star next to everything that was in your pantry. Also circle anything that you grew on your own, or produced on your property.

## 3. What Does Your Family Enjoy Eating?

Now that you have a better idea of how much food from your pantry you're already using, it's time to think about food your family actually enjoys. This step is important because if you fill your pantry with food your family despises, you won't use those food reserves. You'll actually have wasted money on food that likely won't be used before it expires. That sort of defeats the purpose.

If you're already a meal planner, you can pull out several of your old meal plans and look over which meals your family enjoyed. If not, take a few minutes now to write down several meals that your family enjoys. Try to think about breakfast, lunch, and dinner to ensure you're prepared for each meal of the day.

Once you've created your list, look for similarities. Are there several recipes that use oats? Or that use a particular type of bean?

Those items need to be in your pantry! They're items you use in multiple dishes, and you know you'll eat.

## Is Building a Pantry of Food Reserves Expensive?

If you have nothing in your cupboards and plan on adding a month's worth of staples, then yes—building a pantry can be expensive.

But, it doesn't have to be. You can start slowly—adding a few extra cans or bags to your grocery cart each time you go shopping.

Look for bargains on what you know you'll eat. If you find cans of tomato sauce marked down, buy as much as you can. Look for deals on flour, rice, and spices.

If you only buy items for your pantry when they're at their lowest price point, you'll save money in the long run.

## How I Tackle Pantry Building

I live in the middle of nowhere, and it costs money to get to the store. This realization helped shape my current pantry building routine. I now try to shop only once a month. My goal of each trip is to ensure my pantry is well-stocked enough that I can go 6-8 weeks without visiting the store.

Though I usually shop more frequently, I love knowing that I don't have to. It's been especially helpful if the kids are sick when I'm planning on going to the store.

But how did I get to this point? Let me walk you through what works for me in hopes it'll inspire you to create a plan that works for you.

# HOW LONG DOES *food* last?

HERE'S WHAT TO *keep*...  
AND WHAT TO *toss*

IF YOU STORE IT IN YOUR...

freezer	pantry	fridge
LUNCH MEAT 1-2 months 	BREAD 5-7 days 	FRUIT 2 days 
FISH 2-6 months 	PEANUT BUTTER 6 months 	BREAD DOUGH 3 - 4 days 
GROUND MEAT 3-4 months 	CEREAL 1 year 	LEFT OVERS 4 days 
BEEF STEAKS 6-12 months 	RICE 1 year 	BUTTER 3 months 
WHOLE POULTRY 1 year 	CANNED GOODS 1 year 	CHEESE 1 - 2 weeks 
BREAD 1 year 	SALAD DRESSING 1 year 	POULTRY 1 - 2 days 
FRESH VEGGIES 1 year 	JAM, SYRUP 1 year 	STEAK 3 - 5 days 
FRESH FRUIT 1 year 	PASTA 2 years 	EGGS 3-5 weeks 

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## An Annual Meal Plan

I hate meal planning. I know it saves money, but it's not something I enjoy. So I learned how to minimize the amount of time spent meal planning.

The kids and I work every July to create an annual meal plan. We pick a breakfast for each day of the week. That means we eat the same breakfast every Tuesday for a year.

With seven breakfast options, it's not nearly as boring as it sounds. We do the same process for lunch.

Dinner is planned around a theme; such as noodle night. We pick four or five meals for each theme. At this stage in my life, I tend to stick with simple meals as often as possible.

So for noodle night, we may have spaghetti and meatballs one week, and beef stroganoff the next week.

## A Shopping List

Once our meals are planned, I begin creating my shopping list. By the time I'm done, I know how much of any one item I'm going to need for a month's worth of meals. I know what I need to buy when I go to the store.

By using a little basic math, I can easily extrapolate how much I'll need for a year. That means when spaghetti noodles go on sale by the case, I can accurately predict how much we'll go through in a year. And I buy that many.

Now I don't have to buy spaghetti for a long time. I can take the money I was using to buy spaghetti each month and put it towards another staple. Doing this allows me to continue to build a stockpile without spending an arm and a leg.

I'm buying what I know we'll use before the expiration date rolls around. But more importantly, I'm buying food that already has a purpose.

That keeps me from stocking up on canned kidney beans just because they're on sale. No one in my house really likes kidney beans. Before I figured out this food reserves thing, I had a dozen cans just sitting on my pantry shelf. I bought them because I knew I should have food on hand.

But just having food on hand doesn't actually help feed your family on a daily basis if it's food they don't like. A shopping list will help you be wise as you build your pantry.

## Building Food Reserves at Different Seasons

Because of the snow we get here, it's much more difficult for me to go to the store regularly in the winter. That means I spend my summer and fall building even more of a reserve.

Conversely, in the summer I'm able to grow more of our own food. Our chickens are laying at their peak production. Our cow is putting out a lot more milk.

There's also a ton of [edibles growing](#) in the forest. I don't need to worry about having as much food on hand, because I know we can eat emergency meals based on what we produce if necessary. That's

why I picked July to redo our food plans.

I can let our stores get used up leading into summer. I make sure we use the last of things I won't need again with the new menu. I'm able to save some grocery dollars this way.

Then, when I'm ready to start building a new year's worth of reserves in August, I have extra money to use.

Spend some time thinking about the seasons where you live. Are there months when you're without an income due to seasonal employment? Are there months where flu season is running so rampant that you don't want to leave your house any more than necessary?

Do you visit a farmer's market in the summer or participate in a local CSA? Do you grow your own food during some seasons?

Think about your year, and the highs and lows you have. You can prepare for these seasons by having food reserves on hand. A well-stocked pantry helps you make it through the rough patches in life.

Where Do You Live?

Where you live also impacts your needed reserves. Think through the amount of space you have on hand. You may have to [get creative to store your extra food](#).

If you grow and preserve much of your food, your shopping list will be different than a family who lives in an urban setting.

Start Filling Your Pantry

You know now what kinds of food your family eats regularly. You have an idea of what meals you can make and know that everyone will eat.

You're ready to start filling your pantry. Start slowly, and buy as much extra as your [budget](#) allows.

Try to buy food when it's on sale, and only buy food that you'll actually eat.

How did you start building your food reserves? If your pantry is ready to sustain your family in the midst of a mini-crisis, please tell us how you started in the comments section below.

If you haven't yet started, is there a particular question you have about building your reserves? Chime in in the comments, and other readers can help!

And click on the banner below to find out how our ancestors planned their food reserves for survival!



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