

## STOCKING THE PANTRY

Last week we talked about some basic tools in your kitchen. This week I've got a few ideas on what supplies should be in your basic pantry. Let's start with dry goods. Here's my basic list.

Coffee, (you can store ground or whole beans in the freezer), tea, both regular and herbal, cold and hot cereals, (I keep instant oatmeal on hand for cold rainy mornings), bread, (did you know you can keep bread in the freezer for several months), some dry beans and grains, such as couscous, barley, and so on, pasta, like spaghetti and some kind of short macaroni, and rice. You'll also need a bag of all-purpose flour, granulated sugar, and a small box of cornstarch to thicken sauces. I also like to have a little box of brown sugar and a bottle of real maple syrup. (It's so much better on pancakes than the imitation stuff.) And if you want to bake, add a tin of baking powder and a box of baking soda, plus a bottle of vanilla and one of almond extract.

Moving on to bottled and canned goods, here's what I'd start with. Some assorted oils and vinegars. I recommend one good all-purpose cooking oil, like canola, and a bottle of extra-virgin olive oil. I keep several different vinegars and use them a lot for flavoring, but I think a basic supply should include cider vinegar, a wine vinegar, either red or white, and a bottle of balsamic vinegar for salad dressings and for flavoring soups and sauces. I also like to have a bottle of unsweetened rice vinegar as it is very mild and clean tasting. Flavored vinegars, like raspberry, or sherry vinegar, are also good, but we're talking basics here.

I also like to keep a bottle of dry white wine and dry red wine on hand for adding to sauces or deglazing frying pans. If you don't keep wine regularly on hand, at least buy a bottle of dry vermouth, which can be used any time a recipe calls for a splash of wine and does wonders for your cooking.

There are some basic canned foods I keep on the shelf as well. They include canned chili, a couple of cans of chicken broth, a couple of cans of my favorite soups, a couple of packets of ramen, and a can or two of diced tomatoes. I also keep some canned clams and a bottle of clam juice, which can make a quick pasta sauce. If you're adding a few more things, I like to keep olives in the refrigerator—usually some pitted calamata olives which can go into a salad or into a pasta sauce, and a jar of capers, which, with some lemon juice, can make a quick tangy sauce for meat or some quickly sautéed chicken breasts.

As to condiments, this is very subjective, but here's what I consider the basics: salt and pepper, and that's whole peppercorns to put in your pepper grinder, (pre-ground pepper quickly loses its flavor and aroma and just tastes like acrid sawdust), some red pepper flakes, some spices and spice blends, like chili powder, cinnamon, ground cumin, curry powder and paprika, and some dry herbs, like bay leaves, oregano, thyme, rosemary and basil. I also like to have a jar of an herb blend, like *fines herbes* or *herbes de Provence*.

I also keep a bottle of Dijon-style mustard, a bottle of catsup, and a jar of mayonnaise. You can also add a jar of pickles, some salsa, and a bottle of horseradish, (which can be used in sandwiches and salad dressings and certain cream and tomato based sauces, as well as on your roast beef). All of these should be kept in the refrigerator after opening. And you'll want a bottle of hot sauce, like Tabasco or whatever is your favorite, a bottle of Lea and Perrins Worcestershire sauce, and a bottle of all-purpose soy sauce. These don't have to be refrigerated.

In the refrigerator, I keep milk, eggs, orange juice, half and half, unsalted butter, (it has a higher butterfat content than salted butter and allows you to better control the amount of salt in your cooking, some cheese, and salad makings, (but don't store the tomatoes in the refrigerator.) I like to keep carrots, celery, sweet red peppers and mushrooms in the vegetable drawer also. You can also add some yogurt, ice cream or frozen yogurt, and some specialty breads like bagels. On the counter I keep bananas, onions, tomatoes, garlic, some apples, and a lemon or two. A little lemon juice perks up the flavor in all sorts of things and is really a cook's secret weapon. Don't buy the lemon juice in the little plastic lemons—it's bitter. So is bottled lemon juice. Use fresh.

These are the things I consider the basic supplies for any working kitchen. You'll want to add to them depending on your own tastes and the level of cooking you want to do. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.