# Organizing the Pantry

 To make the best use of the food you already have in your pantry, you need to be able to find it! Keeping an organized pantry also helps when making a shopping list, and helps you save money because you’re less likely to waste the food you’ve already bought when you can see it. These three steps can help you do it.

1. Sort and purge

 Start by taking everything out. It’s easier to think of your pantry in a new way when you start with blank shelves. At this time, if you notice anything past it’s due date throw it out. With all your pantry items laid out, you can also start to organize them into groups – pastas, canned goods, baking goods, etc. Physically group similar items together.

2. Clean

 The next step is cleaning the pantry. Wipe down all the shelves (and walls if they need it) and clean the floor. If you have other things hanging on the wall, remove them also. This is your chance to re-plan everything and de-clutter. Depending how far you want to go with this project, you may even decide that a coat of paint is in order. But if not, just give the place a good cleaning.

3. Plan

 Now is the time to really look at the food, how you use it, and how best to organize it all. Here are a few tips on how to do this:

* Items you use frequently should be stored at or around eye level.
* The top shelves should be reserved for less frequently used items (e.g.: bread crumbs, baking supplies, etc.)
* Consider using organizational helpers like smaller shelf units to store smaller items, and a Lazy Susan to store condiments, vinegars, and oils. The Lazy Susan makes it easy to get at the various bottles plus helps keep your shelves cleaner as oils tend to get a bit messy sometimes.
* Reserve a shelf around eye level or below for grains and pasta. If you like you could even transfer your grains and pastas into large, clear jars with labels to help keep them fresh and organized. Label the jars. If you forget how to cook different types of grains, write the cooking instructions on the back of the labels. (e.g.: 1 cup of rice : 2 cups of water)
* The bottom shelf should be reserved for heavy items – big boxes, flats of canned goods, pops and juices, potatoes, bulk items you get at Costco, etc.
* Another good tip is to have one section of a shelf for those items that should be used before they expire. Think of it as a ‘use me!’ shelf.
* Bulk spices could be kept in clear jars placed in a box. When you need to refill the spice containers in your spice rack just pull out the whole box. You’ll also be able to see which spices you need to get more of when making a shopping list. The same idea is also good for teas and coffee.
* If there are people in the house with special dietary preferences/requirements (e.g.: gluten-free items), store these items together.

Check out the picture here; it’s an example of all the above tips.

