MY ZERO WASTE KITCHEN

HOLISTIC LIVING · CLEAN COOKING

The 7-Day Pantry *Challenge*

Cook mostly from what's already on your shelves for one week. Find the forgotten bags, use the open jars, and shop only for the fresh things that make them a meal.

Daily tasks
One small task for each of the seven days

Pantry heroes
An inventory of what to cook first

Meal matrix
Staple × flavor ideas when you're stuck

Finish tally
What you used, what you'll stop buying

myzerowastekitchen.com

2026 edition

HOW IT WORKS

Seven days, one task a day

"Mostly" is the point. Buy fresh produce, milk or eggs if they turn a pantry staple into dinner. Skip the shelf-stable aisles until Day 7.

DAY 1

Take stock

Empty one shelf at a time and fill in the Pantry Hero page. Pull anything open or near its best-by date to the front. **Safety first:** USDA says to discard swollen cans and never taste food from a suspect can.

DAY 2

Pick three heroes

Circle three items that most need using. Cook one big pot of a base, like rice, beans or lentils, so the next few meals start half done.

DAY 3

Cook from the matrix

Pick a staple and a flavor direction from page 4 and make it tonight with what you have. Swap freely; the matrix is a starting point, not a recipe.

DAY 4

Open the oldest jar

Find the oldest open item and build a meal around it. Sniff oils, nuts and whole-grain flour first. If they smell rancid, compost them and note it.

DAY 5

Pantry meets fridge

Pair a pantry staple with a fridge item that needs using: wilting greens into bean soup, the last peppers into fried rice.

DAY 6

Bake or snack from the shelf

Use the baking shelf. **Test leaveners first:** Penn State says 1 tsp baking powder in ⅓ cup hot water should foam vigorously.

DAY 7

Tally & restock smart

Fill in the finish page. Write a shopping list of only what you ran out of and actually missed this week.

No guilt trips
Composting something stale is information, not failure.

Fresh is fine
Produce, dairy and eggs are allowed. That's what makes pantry food a meal.

Dates are quality
USDA says "Best if Used By" is not a safety date. Check the food itself.

DAY ONE

Your pantry hero inventory

List what you have, oldest and open first. Star the heroes: the items this week's meals will be built around.

★	ITEM	AMOUNT	OPEN?	BEST-BY	MEAL IDEA

Skip it, don't taste it. USDA FSIS: discard swollen or bulging cans, don't use leaking or deeply dented ones, and discard any can with a deep dent on a seam. Toss pantry food with webbing or insects.

WHEN YOU'RE STUCK

The pantry meal matrix

Find your staple on the left, pick a flavor direction across the top, and you have a starting point. Add whatever fresh vegetables need using.

STAPLE	TACO	ITALIAN	CURRY	STIR-FRY	LEMON-HERB	SOUP
Rice	Burrito bowls with beans and salsa	Stovetop risotto-style rice with broth	Vegetable curry over rice	Fried rice with egg and odds and ends	Herbed pilaf with lemon zest	Rice and vegetable soup
Beans & lentils	Refried beans, tacos, nachos	White beans with greens and garlic	Lentil dal or chickpea curry	Crispy chickpeas with stir-fried veg	Bean salad with lemon and herbs	Minestrone or black bean soup
Pasta & noodles	Taco-spiced skillet pasta	Pasta with marinara or aglio e olio	Curried noodles with coconut milk	Sesame or peanut noodles	Lemon-garlic pasta with herbs	Pasta e fagioli
Canned tomatoes	Salsa or tortilla soup base	Marinara or shakshuka	Tomato curry sauce	Tomato and egg stir-fry	Tomato braised beans with herbs	Tomato soup
Oats	Savory oats with salsa and egg	Oat-crusted baked vegetables	Savory spiced oats	Oats as a binder in veggie patties	Oat crumble with lemon zest	Oats to thicken a vegetable soup
Flour & cornmeal	Cornbread with chiles	Polenta with sauce	Skillet flatbread for dipping	Scallion pancakes	Herb flatbread	Dumplings for soup

Make it a meal

Staple + a vegetable that needs using + a protein (beans, eggs, canned fish) + a flavor direction. That formula covers most pantry dinners.

Mind the leftovers

Cook once, eat twice: Day 2's pot of rice or beans feeds Days 3 to 5. Refrigerate leftovers promptly and keep your fridge at 40°F or below, as USDA advises.

Want recipes? Search myzerowastekitchen.com for the staple you have the most of.

DAY SEVEN

Your week, tallied.

The count

THIS WEEK	COUNT
Meals cooked mostly from the pantry	
Items used up completely	
Items composted or tossed	
Shelf-stable items bought	

What I learned

STOP BUYING

ALWAYS KEEP STOCKED

FAVORITE PANTRY MEAL

Carry it forward

Heroes left for next week _____

One habit I'm keeping _____

Restock only _____

Keep it going. The pantry reset post at myzerowastekitchen.com covers the four-zone system and container setup. For the full worksheets, labels and sourced shelf-life charts, see *The Complete Guide to Zero-Waste Pantry Organization*.

Sources

1. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. *Shelf-Stable Food Safety*. Archived at govinfo.gov (GOVPUB-A110-PURL-gpo38739).
2. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. "Food Product Dating." fsis.usda.gov
3. USDA. Consumer guidance on food storage (refrigerator at 40°F or below). usda.gov/node/18284
4. Zepp, M. "Storing Staple Ingredients in the Kitchen." Penn State Extension, updated Aug. 2024. extension.psu.edu/storing-staple-ingredients-in-the-kitchen
5. Blakeslee, K. *Safe Food Storage: The Cupboard* (MF3131). Kansas State University Research and Extension, rev. 2026.

This challenge is general guidance, not medical, nutrition or food-safety advice. When in doubt, throw it out, and never taste food from a damaged can. © 2026 My Zero Waste Kitchen, a Dan Duda Ventures company.