Pantry Cookbook Recipes

How to Use Free Pantries to Offset High Food Costs

Free pantries are a valuable resource for those looking to reduce food expenses without sacrificing nutrition. By taking advantage of local food pantries, you can access canned goods, grains, and other pantry staples that can help stretch your budget. Here are some tips for using free pantries effectively:

1. **Plan Ahead**: Before visiting, check your pantry to see what items you already have, and then create a list of what you still need. Many free pantries offer a variety of goods, so knowing what you're looking for can help you maximize your visit.
2. **Incorporate Canned Goods**: Canned beans, vegetables, fruits, and meats are staples in many free pantries. While these items may sometimes lack freshness, there are simple ways to make them healthier:
    - **Rinse Canned Beans and Vegetables**: To reduce excess sodium, drain and rinse canned beans and vegetables under cold water before cooking.
    - **Add Fresh Ingredients**: Boost the nutritional value of canned goods by adding fresh or frozen vegetables, lean proteins, or whole grains to dishes.
    - **Season Wisely**: Instead of using high-sodium canned sauces, flavor canned goods with herbs, spices, and a splash of olive oil to keep meals both tasty and healthy.
3. **Combine Staples for Nutritious Meals**: Mix pantry items like canned beans, rice, and pasta with a few fresh ingredients for balanced, hearty meals. For example, a simple rice and bean bowl can be transformed into a protein-packed dish by adding spices, avocado, or a sprinkle of cheese.
4. **Use Canned Fruit Smartly**: Canned fruits are often packed in syrup, but you can easily reduce sugar content by rinsing them. For an extra boost of nutrition, incorporate canned fruit into smoothies, oatmeal, or yogurt parfaits for a sweet and filling snack.

Below are a few recipes to help you transform typical pantry items into delicious, healthy, and affordable meals. Contact studentwellness@rccc.edu if you have any questions or to schedule a pantry appointment!

1. Grain Recipes

Pasta with Garlic and Olive Oil (Aglio e Olio)

Ingredients:

- 8 oz dry pasta (spaghetti, penne, or any kind)
- 3-4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Grated Parmesan (optional)

Instructions:

1. Cook the pasta according to package instructions. Reserve about 1/2 cup of pasta water.
2. While the pasta cooks, heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Add garlic slices and cook until golden and fragrant, being careful not to burn it.
3. If you like spice, add a pinch of crushed red pepper flakes.
4. Drain the pasta and add it to the pan with garlic and olive oil. Toss to coat, adding reserved pasta water a little at a time to help the sauce adhere.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with grated Parmesan if you have it on hand.

Rice and Bean Stir-Fry

Ingredients:

- 1 cup rice (any variety)
- 1 can of beans (black beans, kidney beans, etc.), drained and rinsed
- 1 onion, chopped (optional)
- 1 bell pepper, chopped (optional)
- Soy sauce or teriyaki sauce
- 1-2 tbsp oil for frying

Instructions:

1. Cook the rice according to the package instructions.
2. In a large pan, heat oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and bell pepper (if using) and sauté until softened.
3. Add the beans to the pan and cook for another 2-3 minutes.
4. Add the cooked rice to the pan and stir everything together. Drizzle with soy sauce or teriyaki sauce to taste.
5. Cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until everything is heated through. Serve hot.

Instant Mac and Cheese with Veggies

Ingredients:

- 1 box of instant mac and cheese
- 1/2 cup frozen peas or any veggies you have on hand (corn, carrots, etc.)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: shredded cheese for extra creaminess

Instructions:

1. Prepare the instant mac and cheese as directed on the box.
2. About 3 minutes before the mac and cheese is done, add the frozen veggies to the pot so they can cook and thaw in the boiling water.
3. Once everything is cooked, drain any excess water, then add the cheese packet and stir until creamy.
4. Season with salt and pepper and add some extra shredded cheese if you want it even cheesier.

Rice Pudding

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup cooked rice (preferably leftover)
- 1 cup milk (or any dairy alternative)
- 1 tbsp sugar or honey
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- A pinch of salt
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, combine cooked rice, milk, sugar, and salt over medium heat.
2. Stir constantly, bringing it to a gentle simmer, and cook for about 10-15 minutes, until it thickens and becomes creamy.
3. Stir in cinnamon and vanilla extract if desired.
4. Once the pudding reaches your desired consistency, remove from heat and let it cool slightly before serving. You can enjoy it warm or chilled!

Cheesy Rice Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 cup rice (any kind)
- 1 can of cream of mushroom or cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup shredded cheese (cheddar works well)
- 1/4 cup milk or water
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. Cook the rice according to package instructions.
3. In a large mixing bowl, combine the cooked rice, cream of soup, milk or water, and garlic powder. Mix well.
4. Stir in the shredded cheese and season with salt and pepper.
5. Transfer the mixture into a baking dish and spread it out evenly.
6. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until the casserole is bubbly and golden on top.
7. Serve warm and enjoy!

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2. Protein Recipes

Bean & Rice Burrito Bowls

Ingredients:

- 1 can of black beans or kidney beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1 can of corn (drained)
- 1 can of diced tomatoes (with or without chilies)
- 1 cup of rice (preferably cooked ahead)
- 1 packet of taco seasoning (or cumin, garlic powder, paprika, salt, and pepper)
- 1/2 cup of shredded cheese (optional)
- Sour cream or salsa (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a medium pan, heat the canned beans and corn over medium heat. Stir occasionally.
2. Add the canned diced tomatoes and taco seasoning. Simmer for 5-7 minutes until everything is heated through.
3. In a bowl, layer cooked rice as the base.
4. Pour the bean, corn, and tomato mixture over the rice.
5. Top with cheese, sour cream, or salsa if desired.

Tuna Noodle Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 can of tuna (drained)
- 1 can of cream of mushroom soup
- 1 can of peas (drained)
- 2 cups of cooked pasta (penne, elbow macaroni, or any kind you have on hand)
- 1/2 cup of milk
- 1/2 cup of shredded cheese (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. In a large bowl, mix the drained tuna, cream of mushroom soup, peas, cooked pasta, and milk. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Transfer the mixture to a baking dish and top with shredded cheese.
4. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until the top is golden and bubbly.

Chili Mac

Ingredients:

- 1 can of chili (with or without beans)
- 1 cup of cooked macaroni or pasta
- 1 can of diced tomatoes
- 1/2 cup of shredded cheese (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. In a large pan, heat the canned chili over medium heat.
2. Add the canned diced tomatoes and bring the mixture to a simmer.
3. Add the cooked pasta and stir until everything is well combined.
4. Let it cook for an additional 3-5 minutes to blend the flavors.
5. Top with shredded cheese if desired and serve hot.

Canned Chicken Stir-Fry

Ingredients:

- 1 can of canned chicken (drained)
- 1 can of mixed vegetables (drained)
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 cups of cooked rice (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a large pan, heat the oil over medium heat.
2. Add the canned chicken and cook for 3-5 minutes until slightly browned.
3. Add the mixed vegetables, garlic powder, onion powder, and soy sauce. Stir to combine.
4. Cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until everything is heated through.
5. Serve over a bed of rice or as is.

Soup & Sandwich Combo

Ingredients:

- 1 can of tomato soup (or any other soup you prefer)
- 2 slices of bread
- 1-2 tablespoons butter
- 2 slices of cheese (optional, for a grilled cheese sandwich)

Instructions:

1. Heat the canned soup in a pot according to the instructions.
2. While the soup is heating, butter one side of each slice of bread. Place cheese between the unbuttered sides and grill on medium heat until golden and crispy, about 3-4 minutes per side.
3. Serve the grilled cheese sandwich alongside the hot soup for a classic and comforting meal.

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3. Fruit and Veggie Recipes

Canned Veggie Stir-Fry

Ingredients:

- 1 can of mixed vegetables (drained)
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon ginger (optional)
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds (optional)
- Cooked rice (optional, for serving)

Instructions:

1. In a large pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat.
2. Add the drained mixed vegetables and stir-fry for about 5-7 minutes until they're heated through.
3. Add the soy sauce, garlic powder, and ginger (if using), and stir to combine.
4. Continue to cook for another 2-3 minutes to allow the flavors to meld.
5. Serve the stir-fry over cooked rice, and sprinkle with sesame seeds if desired.

Canned Sweet Potato & Black Bean Chili

Ingredients:

- 1 can of sweet potatoes (drained and chopped)
- 1 can of black beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1 can of diced tomatoes
- 1 can of corn (drained)
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup of vegetable or chicken broth

Instructions:

1. In a large pot, combine the sweet potatoes, black beans, diced tomatoes, and corn.
2. Add the vegetable or chicken broth, chili powder, cumin, salt, and pepper.
3. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, and cook for 15-20 minutes to allow the flavors to combine.
4. Adjust seasoning to taste, and serve hot. You can garnish with sour cream or shredded cheese if you like.

Canned Peach Crisp

Ingredients:

- 2 cans of canned peaches (drained)
- 1 cup old-fashioned oats
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup butter (melted)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. In a baking dish, spread the drained peaches evenly on the bottom.
3. In a separate bowl, mix together oats, brown sugar, flour, melted butter, cinnamon, and a pinch of salt until crumbly.
4. Sprinkle the oat mixture over the peaches.
5. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until the top is golden and crispy.
6. Serve warm, optionally with ice cream or whipped cream.

Canned Green Bean Almondine

Ingredients:

- 1 can of green beans (drained)
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium heat.
2. Add the sliced almonds and sauté for about 2-3 minutes until they begin to turn golden.
3. Add the drained green beans to the skillet and stir to combine.
4. Season with salt, pepper, and a squeeze of lemon juice (if desired).
5. Cook for an additional 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the green beans are heated through.
6. Serve as a simple side dish.

Tropical Fruit Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 can of pineapple chunks (drained)
- 1 can of mandarin oranges (drained)
- 1 can of coconut milk (unsweetened)
- 1 tablespoon honey or sugar (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon (optional)
- Fresh mint leaves (optional, for garnish)

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, combine the drained pineapple chunks and mandarin oranges.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the coconut milk, honey or sugar, and cinnamon until smooth.
3. Pour the coconut mixture over the fruit and gently toss to combine.
4. Garnish with fresh mint leaves if desired and serve chilled.

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4. Breakfast Item Recipes

Savory Instant Grits with Cheese and Eggs

Ingredients:

- 1 packet of instant grits
- 1/4 cup of shredded cheese (cheddar or any cheese you prefer)
- 1 egg
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon butter (optional)

Instructions:

1. Prepare the instant grits according to the package directions, usually by adding hot water or milk to the grits.
2. Once the grits are cooked, stir in the shredded cheese until melted. Add salt and pepper to taste.
3. In a separate pan, scramble or fry the egg to your liking.
4. Serve the cheesy grits topped with the egg. You can add a dollop of butter for extra richness if desired.

Granola & Yogurt Parfait

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup granola
- 1/2 cup dry milk (reconstituted with water according to package directions)
- 1/4 cup honey or maple syrup (optional)
- Fresh fruit (optional)

Instructions:

1. Reconstitute the dry milk by mixing it with the appropriate amount of water according to the package directions.
2. In a glass or bowl, layer the granola, reconstituted milk, and a drizzle of honey or maple syrup.
3. Top with fresh fruit like berries, bananas, or any fruit you have on hand (optional).
4. Serve immediately as a nutritious and filling breakfast or snack.

Instant Oatmeal Pancakes

Ingredients:

- 1 packet of instant oatmeal (flavor of your choice)
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup of milk (or dry milk reconstituted)
- 1/4 cup of flour (optional for thicker batter)
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder (optional for fluffier pancakes)
- A pinch of salt
- Butter or oil for cooking

Instructions:

1. In a bowl, combine the instant oatmeal, egg, reconstituted milk, flour (if using), baking powder, and salt. Stir until smooth.
2. Heat a skillet or griddle over medium heat and add a bit of butter or oil.
3. Pour the batter onto the skillet in small circles to form pancakes. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side, until golden brown.
4. Serve with syrup, fruit, or a sprinkle of cinnamon if desired.

Crispy Cereal Bars

Ingredients:

- 2 cups dry cereal (cornflakes, puffed rice, or any cereal you have)
- 1/4 cup honey or maple syrup
- 1/4 cup peanut butter or any nut butter
- 1/4 cup dry milk (reconstituted with water)
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a small saucepan, heat the honey and peanut butter over low heat until melted and smooth. Stir in the reconstituted dry milk and vanilla extract.
2. In a large bowl, mix the dry cereal with the wet mixture until well-coated.
3. Press the mixture into a greased baking dish or a parchment-lined pan.
4. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or until firm.
5. Cut into bars and enjoy as a quick breakfast or snack.

Instant Oatmeal Smoothie

Ingredients:

- 1 packet of instant oatmeal (any flavor)
- 1/2 cup dry milk (reconstituted with water)
- 1/2 banana (or any fruit you have on hand)
- 1/2 cup water or juice
- Ice cubes (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a blender, combine the instant oatmeal, reconstituted dry milk, banana, and water or juice.
2. Blend until smooth. Add ice cubes for a colder, thicker texture.
3. Pour into a glass and enjoy a creamy, nutritious smoothie for breakfast or a snack.