



Let's
Ace
Your Space

WITH LEANNE PRUETT

**PANTRY REFRESH
AND
KITCHEN HACKS**

PANTRY REFRESH

Getting your pantry in shape helps on so many levels – first, it DECLUTTERS that portion of your house, so you can check something off your decluttering list. Second it sets us up for really acing your cooking, eating and health!

I'm going to give you two techniques for decluttering and organizing your pantry – you can decide which one you want to try.

METHOD 1 - THE WHOLE SHEBANG

This method for organizing and up-leveling your pantry is all-inclusive, because you're going to be taking everything out of your pantry, determining if it belongs, and then putting it back in an organized fashion. Yes, this can take a bit of time, but you will really get your pantry in great order.

Here's what you do:

Pull everything out of your pantry. I'd suggest doing this in stages, particularly if you've got a large pantry, or your pockets of time are limited.

While the pantry is empty, give the shelves a good clean (if you are so inclined, you can put down shelf paper, to make the job a little easier next time)

Now, look at each item you pulled out of the pantry to see if:

- Anything is out of date or spoiled
- Anything that has been in the pantry a while and isn't being used
- Any spices you're not using.
- Any item in your pantry that is something you are your family just don't like and don't want to eat

While you're analyzing the pantry contents, make note of anything that's running low or things you're using more quickly than expected, so that you can replenish them the next time you hit the grocery store.

Put the food that's staying back into the pantry, and arrange the food items so you can easily see them and so they're grouped with 'like' items (using baskets, containers and 'lazy Susans' can help you maximize your space – check out the pantry hacks for lots of ideas).

Discard the pantry items you're not using (if there are any unopened items that are not yet out of date that you just don't like, you can consider donating them to a food pantry).

Your Refrigerator and Freezer

While you're at it, let's clean out that refrigerator and freezer.

Just like you did the pantry, pull everything out – you can do a couple of shelves/sections at a time.

Get rid of

- Anything out of date or spoiled
- Any old condiments or other jarred items you aren't using
- Any old leftovers hanging around the fridge
- Anything you and your family just don't like and are not eating.

Once you're done, after a good cleaning, put those items back in the refrigerator and freezer, and take note of what you might need to restock.

METHOD 2 – 'MAKE IT BETTER'

If you've got limited time, but want to make progress on your pantry, you can try this technique. I tried this in my pantry about a year ago and got some decent results. I found out about this technique from organizer Alejandra Costello on one of her YouTube videos.

Here's what you do:

Set a timer for 10 or 15 minutes and get started working on a space with the idea that the end goal is simply that the space is better than it was when you started (Alejandro recommends 15 minutes – when I tried it, I did 10 minutes, knowing it would take multiple 'sessions'). This is an ideal technique to use on smaller spaces like closets and pantries.

A couple things to keep in mind while you do this:

- Look at pantry items as you're going through them and discard items that are out of date, spoiled, old or you just don't like (take a garbage bag in there with you)
- Put like things with like (so things aren't so jumbled in your pantry)

When the timer rings, it's time to STOP.

It will probably take you 4 to 5 (or more) sessions to really get your pantry in shape – but you can do it easily over the course of a week, if you take time every day to make a little progress.

So . . . what's in MY pantry??

I avoid sugar and flour, so here are some of the foods that I have in my pantry:

- Nuts and nut butters
- Non-flour based crackers (I love Simple Mills Sprouted Seed crackers – they're always in the pantry)
- Gluten/ Grain free flours (I use a mix of several flours – Coconut, Cassava, Arrowroot, Tigernut – I stay away from grain based flours, and I'm sensitive to almond, so I stay away from almond flour, also)
- Teas and coffees
- Coconut milk (I don't use dairy, and I'm sensitive to almond and cashew milk, so this is my go-to)
- Canned beans and vegetables (to use if I'm out of fresh veggies)
- Canned tuna and salmon
- Canned / packaged fruits (to use if I'm out of fresh fruit)
- Seltzers (like the La Croix brand of products)
- Olive oil (and other lightly processed oils)
- Ghee
- Tahini
- Coconut oil (this is not my favorite for savory foods – don't love my roast broccoli tasting like coconut, but I do use it for some things!)
- Various vinegars (white, apple cider, balsamic, etc.)
- Non-sugar sweeteners
- Bean-based pastas (I like chickpea pasta)

And here are some of the things you can find in my refrigerator: fresh fruits and vegetables, protein sources, coconut yogurt (my absolute FAVORITE brand is Cocolune – their plain coconut yogurt is the closest I've found to plain Greek yogurt) hummus, goat cheese, a few single serve wines or beers for 'virtual' happy hours.



This is a picture of my pantry before my kitchen renovation in 2018, showing some great pantry hacks!



This is a picture of my pantry post-renovation, with a few more great pantry hacks!

PANTRY HACKS



If you've got wire shelves, consider putting clear plastic on the shelves, or add simple trays, like I did. Trays also allow you to easily sort your items into different categories. The ones I used are from IKEA

I also use baskets to group items – Pre-reno, and pantry update, I used plastic baskets and they worked great. Currently I use wire mesh baskets. I've got a basket for potatoes and a separate one for onions. Larger baskets hold canned vegetables and tuna/salmon, and I've got one that holds snacks (dark chocolate and a few bags of microwave popcorn for movie nights). You can easily find baskets at dollar stores, big box stores (Target, K-Mart), or the Container Store. You can also find them online at Amazon.com

For spices, I use riser racks to store them, so that back rows are elevated, and I can see what I've got. These are also great for canned goods. You can find these at the Container Store, Bed Bath and Beyond, and Amazon.com



I also like to store or decant items into separate containers – In the 'pre-reno' picture, you see a few plastic containers on my shelf (those are Lock and Lock brand – you can get them on Amazon, but QVC usually has the best selection of items). Post-reno, I am now using glass containers to decant and store most things.

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If you're not decanting things into containers, use binder clips to keep bags closed tightly. You can use clothes pins too – but I think the binder clips are sturdier.

Consider mounting [clear plastic sink caddies](#) to pantry walls to hold small items. You can mount them using the Command strips – just don't put anything too heavy in there.



For a pantry shelf with a corner, put a lazy Susan in the corner so that you can easily reach all pantry items. I've got them in my current pantry. You can find them on Amazon or the Container Store, or somewhere like Bed, Bath and Beyond or Target.

For a regular door (instead of a bi-fold) – make use of the back of the door and hang door organizers, baskets or hooks.

LABEL EVERYTHING – consider chalkboard labels or preprinted labels – several containers come with affixed chalkboard labels ready for marking.

TIPS AND QUOTES

to help you on your pantry /kitchen decluttering journey

Get rid of things that you bought for your 'fantasy' life [- if you don't scrapbook, get rid of the scrapbooking supplies; if you don't go to lots of fancy parties, get rid of the fancy clothes you're not wearing; if you're not a baker, get rid of the cake pans – AND the baking pantry supplies].

Get rid of things you haven't used in a year.

Decluttering is an ongoing process – reevaluate regularly.

Big Box Stores AREN'T a savings if you don't use everything you buy (if you're throwing out food, etc.).

"Detox your timeline, your page, your home, your refrigerator, under your counters, your closet, your ride, your phone, your life and your mind."

Unknown

"Love it, use it or lose it."

Unknown

"A place for everything, and everything in its place"

Mrs. Beeton – The Book of Household Management.

"The container decides how much you keep. YOU decide what you keep."

Dana White

ACE YOUR SPACE 2020 KITCHEN HACKS

FOOD HACKS

Peel or scrape the skin off fresh ginger with a kitchen spoon. *(Heather Fleming)*

Freeze lemon juice in ice cube trays for easier access, either add to smoothies or add warm water for morning hydration and with tea. *(Heather Fleming)*

Tomato paste is great for everything – it adds umami! - but you rarely use a whole can when you open it. To save that leftover tomato paste and put it to good use, get a large sheet of parchment or wax paper. Dollop spoonfuls of the tomato paste on the paper, with a good bit of space in between. Fold the paper over the tomato paste, sealing each dollop into its own little packet. Pop that into the freezer as-is, and when you need some tomato paste, just unfold a little, take out one of the portions, and throw it into whatever you're cooking. *(Laura Frontiero)*

Don't just make one salad – when you've got your salad fixin's out, make multiple salads (3 to 5 at a time!), put them in glass containers and keep them in the fridge. They'll be fresh for days, and you can easily grab something healthy for lunch or dinner and GO. Try having a salad theme for the week (Spinach, strawberry, chicken; Italian – olive, artichoke hearts, prosciutto, arugula; Garden; Greek, etc.- just pick a theme). *(Laura Frontiero)*

Make a BATCH of salad dressing every week – take a canning jar –don't even measure - add some olive oil, apple cider vinegar (or balsamic), a few spoonfuls of Dijon mustard, maybe a shallot or garlic or other spices; grind a little pepper in there. Put the top on and shake! The Dijon mustard keeps it mixed! *(Laura Frontiero)*

Soak your berries (strawberries, blueberries or blackberries) in 1 part white vinegar to 3-4 parts water for about 3 minutes, let them dry, cut up the strawberries, then mix all the berries in a big container and store it in the fridge, ready to eat – the vinegar rinse kills harmful bacteria and mold that might be on the berries and makes them last sooo much longer (no, they don't taste like vinegar) *(Leanne)*

Chop big portions of nuts (I use pecans, pistachios and macadamia – but you can use whatever you want) – store them in the pantry and sprinkle them on fruit, salads, even protein. *(Leanne)*

Boil several eggs, let them cool, peel them, then store them in a container in the refrigerator, for a quick protein source for breakfast or lunch. *(Leanne)*

Chop celery for tuna, salmon or chicken salads, and store it in the refrigerator, covered in water. The celery lasts a few weeks, if you change the water every 4-5 days. Another great celery hack is to store it in the fridge wrapped in aluminum foil – it will stay fresh for weeks. *(Leanne)*

Prepare sliced or chopped apples ahead of time and keep them from turning brown by soaking them in a saltwater bath (1/8 teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of water) for a few minutes. It really does keep them from turning brown for several days! You can give the apples a rinse in fresh water after you drain them, if you're worried about them tasting salty – I don't, though – and have never had any issues with them tasting salty. *(Leanne)*

Buy a large packet of chicken breasts. Say there are 6 of them. Season two of the breasts with lemon pepper, two with Greek Seasoning, and 2 with BBQ rub and grill. Add to salads, pasta, or eat alone with a side of veggies. Use your favorite seasonings and mix it up so you have a different meal every time! *(Denise Stegall)*

Make chicken breasts ahead of time. I bake 12 in the oven at a time. I'll section 4 out for chicken parmesan, 4 for chicken cacciatore, and 4 I'll cut into strips for salad. I put the strips into baggies, and the whole breasts in containers, and they're ready to go for the week. Then, I put the final meal together the day of – adding the fixings when I cook (f. ex., adding some pasta sauce and a touch of cheese to the chicken parmesan). *(Susanne Taylor-King)*

The fried cauliflower rice from Trader Joes (with peas and edamame and other things) – add some sesame oil and sesame seeds and fry it up in a skillet – you'll think you're eating real fried rice! In fact, my son doesn't know it's not rice. *(Suzanne Taylor-King)*

GADGET AND TOOL HACKS

Buy a great blender for smoothies, soups and frozen banana ice cream. Craving creamy is a thing and is essential. *(Heather Fleming)*

I use a blender for EVERYTHING – I make dressings, sauces, smoothies, soups . . . pretty much batches of EVERYTHING in my blender. *(Debra Atkinson)*

The [Veggetti](#). I love this gadget! It's quick and easy and makes zoodles, spiralized carrots cukes, and other veggies in a minute. I have the bigger, more expensive one, too but I usually pull out the little one because it's much easier. *(Denise Stegall)*

[Glass Food Storage containers](#) are awesome! No more mystery container hiding at the back of your refrigerator. Now you can see what is inside, they stack easily and are microwaveable. Toss your plastic containers and replace them with these. You will not regret it! *(Denise Stegall)*

Every kitchen should have a [salad spinner](#). I honestly have no idea how anyone can make a salad without one. You can wash and prep lettuce and quickly and easily and store it for a few days. I usually put the lettuce (and other veggies) in individual glass containers as soon as the lettuce is dry and 2-3 salads for lunch. Might as well do it all! *(Denise Stegall)*

PROCEDURAL HACKS

Figure out what you eat every week and make an 'evergreen' grocery list to keep on your phone. When it's time to go to the store, just check your list against what you've got in the house – delete anything off the list that you don't need and go do your shopping. After doing this for a little while, you'll be surprised how quickly you're able to get in and out of the grocery store. *(Jason Long)*

Meal plan EVERY week – create your shopping list from that – incorporate dishes you can use more than once (f.ex., rice as a side dish one night and stir fry for lunch the next day; roasted chicken one day, then chicken soup or tacos for another meal). *(Michelle Boss)*

Have a handful of recipes you absolutely love and rotate them. And have a go-to list of meals, so you don't have to think. *(Michelle Boss)*

Keep it simple! An overcomplicated recipe can cause frustration before you begin. Know when you have the energy to cook or order out. *(Heather Fleming)*

Organize your fridge by the Conscious Nutrition Food Tree (or Food Groups). This helps you create meals at a glance and notice when one group is lower on supplies. And save one section for foods that need to be eaten sooner than later. *(Heather Fleming)*

Consider 'decluttering' your food choices and recipes – Keep your recipes really simple – and if a recipe has a ton of specialty ingredients (for example, a yummy ethnic recipe with a lot of different, specific spices that you don't typically use) or specialty equipment (for example, fondue) – make a night out of it and let folks that already have all the ingredients or equipment cook for you. *(Leanne)*

Download [MyFitnessPal](#) and buy a digital kitchen scale and weigh and track your food! You need to know exactly what you're eating before you can really 'learn' anything. *(Jason Long)*



Leanne Pruett is the founder of Let's Ace Your Space.

She's on a mission to help you simplify decluttering so that it no longer blocks your momentum and keeps you from the things you really want in life.

Leanne hasn't always been an organized person, but she has been able to change her habits and mindset around her space to finally get her home decluttered. She's also helped lots of folks declutter and organize their homes to free up powerful mental and physical energy to accomplish their goals.