

Top Pantry Picks Make Mealtime Easy

by Mr. Food,

host of the Mr. Food television show and expert on quick-and-easy food tips for real people

(NAPSA)—Now, more than ever, American families are pressed for time, especially when it comes to getting dinner on the table. I'm a firm believer that if you have the right tools on hand, it's easy to prepare a home-cooked meal that your family will love and that won't leave you slaving in the kitchen.



Mr. Food

First and foremost, a well-stocked pantry allows you to offer your family quick, great-tasting meals any day of the week. To ensure your family lots of variety, here are some of my top picks

that keep the pantry fresh and make mealtime easy:

- Meal kits—paired with fresh meat from the fridge, including chicken, beef and pork, it's easy to create hearty, complete meals in minutes

- Rice and pasta mixes—the perfect complement to any main dish

- Canned fruits and veggies—always ripe for the picking, canned fruits and veggies are a quick way to balance the meal

- Canned meats—tuna and chicken are a great addition to packaged salad mixes

- Spices—nothing makes a meal “your own” like your favorite combination of spices

- Salsas, chutneys, oils and sauces—add a taste of the exotic with Mexican-, Indian- and Asian-inspired condiments

Remember, it's important to rotate the staples in your pantry. Always check expiration and “use by” dates to ensure optimal freshness. A good rule of thumb—canned and jarred goods, as well as white rice and pasta typically last about a year. Brown rice, seasoned rice and pasta mixes should be used within six months.

By using pantry staples like meal kits as a base, it's easy to create a wide variety of dinners that offer a perfect blend of your own flavor and flair. This recipe for Chunky Garden Lasagna is a hearty mix of home-style goodness and market-fresh vegetables. You can experiment with different veggies—fresh or frozen—to create a range of unique tastes.

For more pantry-inspired meals, visit www.DinnerMadeEasy.com.



Rely on pantry staples paired with fresh ingredients for quick-and-easy meal solutions.

Chunky Garden Lasagna

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 3½ cups hot water
- 1 package Hamburger Helper lasagna
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano leaves
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 small tomato, coarsely chopped (½ cup)
- 1 small bell pepper, coarsely chopped (½ cup)
- 1 small zucchini, thinly sliced (1 cup)
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese (4 ounces)
- ¼ cup sliced ripe olives, if desired
- Shredded Parmesan cheese, if desired

Cook beef in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until brown; drain. Stir in hot water, uncooked Pasta, Sauce Mix, oregano, and garlic powder. Heat to boiling, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat; cover and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in tomato, bell pepper, zucchini, mozzarella cheese and ripe olives. Cover and simmer 5 minutes. Remove from heat and uncover (sauce will thicken as it stands). Stir before serving. Serve with Parmesan cheese.

Variation

Instead of zucchini, use a 9- or 10-ounce package of frozen cut Italian green beans. Rinse with cold water to separate and stir in beans with the Sauce Mix. Simmer 15 minutes before adding tomato and bell pepper.

Hamburger Helper is a trademark of General Mills, Inc. or its affiliates.