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WHAT'S HIDING IN YOUR PANTRY???

When was the last time you cleaned out your food pantry? REALLY cleaned it out….reaching all the way back to the bottom shelf, far back in the corner? The results might shock you if my house is any example. In an attempt to take stock of food supplies I did an inventory and found some interesting items like…

- Canned coconut milk for that recipe I meant to try
- Stale breakfast bars
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Nine month old cereal that was so healthy for you it tasted like cardboard
- Jams & jellies in every variety
- Outdated cake mixes
- Unopened package of coconut
- Four different kinds of rice

Some foods went straight to the dumpster. Determined to use things up, I placed single serving foods on display to be eaten immediately. With soaring food costs this is not the time to be a picky eater!

While doing this exercise I wondered why I ever purchased or thought I needed some foods and in so much quantity. Likely a sale at the supermarket convinced me that we really would use up ten cake mixes over the next six months. According to research conducted by Brian Wansink, author of, *Mindless Eating*, “including numbers with a sales promotion leads us to buy 30 to 100 percent more than we normally would.” I admit I’ve been guilty of it and have vowed to become more aware of my shopping habits.

As the garbage can began to overflow I made a note of what items were never used and quizzed family members on what they really wanted to eat. Doing this was a wakeup call…do we need five varieties of dried fruit? Wouldn’t two be plenty? The same is true for dry cereal which goes stale before the box is eaten if there are too many to choose from.

What to do with those pantry items you’ll never eat? First get rid of dry goods past their expiration date. Every food, including commercially canned items, has a use by date. According to USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, high-acid commercially canned food
such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be stored on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid commercially canned food such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years —IF the can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Discard cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted.

As you take stock of your food inventory, set aside commercially canned items for your ticket to the Frederick County Summer Concert Series. Enjoy free, high-quality musical entertainment on Sunday nights at 7:00 p.m. in June, July and August at the Baker Park band shell. Children's performances via the Summerfest Family Theatre happen on Thursday’s at 10:30 a.m. All concerts are free to the public. In lieu of admission, the Summer Concert Series committee asks attendees to bring a canned food item to donate to the Frederick Food Bank. All donations should be brought to the Drees Homes Information Booth.

For a listing of performers visit the website http://www.celebratefrederick.com/

Here are some recipes for using those foods hiding in your pantry. See you at the concert!

**MASHED POTATO CASSEROLE**

Instant mashed potatoes  
Sliced green onions  
1 cup grated cheddar cheese

Prepare eight servings of mashed potatoes according to package directions. Some brands may require only water; for others you may need to add milk and butter/margarine. Wash green onions and slice into thin pieces. Add onions to mashed potatoes and place in a greased 2 quart casserole dish. Top with grated cheese. Sprinkle with paprika and bake for 30 minutes at 350°F.

**COCONUT JELLY BARS**

1/2 cup butter  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon lemon peel, grated  
2 egg yolks  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup baking soda  
1 cup jam, jelly, or preserves  
2 egg whites  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/2 cup nuts  
1/2 cup coconut

Separate egg yolks from egg whites. Cream butter, sugar and lemon peel. Add egg yolks, flour, salt, and baking soda. Spread on cookie sheet. Spread with jam, jelly, or preserves (any kind).
Beat egg whites and stiff and add sugar. Fold in nuts and coconut and spread on top of jelly. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes. Cool and cut into bars.

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