

Plant-Forward PANTRY PERFECT GREEK!

10 Healthy Recipes for

Canned, Frozen and Other Food

You've Got (or Should Have) in the Cupboard!

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BASICS OF A MEDITERRANEAN PANTRY

Having a well-stocked pantry and aiming to keep it within the parameters of a Mediterranean mindset focused on plant-based options is easier than you might think.

Staples like pasta, beans and rice are an integral part of the Mediterranean Diet. Vegetables can be stocked in either frozen or canned form (frozen tastes better). Dried herbs, condiments like olives, capers, preserved vegetables, canned tomatoes, a range of vinegars, a little wine, and olive oil, of course, will provide enough of a foundation to make a huge variety of meals.

Here are some of the things I always keep on hand:



BEANS: DRIED AND/OR CANNED

I would definitely opt for dried over canned beans, but also understand the convenience issue. Canned are a lot easier to work with and don't require soaking and then boiling. I recommend having a mix of both canned and dried in the pantry. Yellow and green split peas are also highly versatile, in soups, as spreads such as Greek fava, and as a dip.



OLIVE OIL

As a Greek cook, I tend to have an abundance of EVOO in my cupboard at any given time and recommend that you do, too. When the Greek financial crisis hit and I was living there, people used to joke that at least they had olive oil. Indeed, it is one of the world's greatest superfoods, chock full of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory properties.





GARLIC.

Nothing to be said! It speaks for itself and it is one of nature's panaceas, lending flavor to almost everything it touches! One of my life lessons came from an old (literally and figuratively) friend on Ikaria, Yiorgos Stenos, who said that as a kid on the island his "penicillin" was sage and garlic tea and a spoonful of honey. Garlic is antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and chock full of nutrients. One clove (3 grams) of raw garlic contains Manganese, Vitamin B6, Vitamin C, Selenium, decent amounts of Calcium, Copper, Potassium, Phosphorus, Iron, and Vitamin B1. Garlic also contains trace amounts of various other nutrients. In fact, it contains a little bit of almost everything you need.



RUSKS.

We call them *paximadia* in Greek, an ancient dehydrated bread (essentially hard tack) made with whole grains such as barley, and made to last...forever. Paximadia are delicious and nutty and literally do keep for years if stored properly (in a cool, dark place, well-sealed). They make a wonderful addition to soups, a good breakfast (think sun-dried tomatoes, sea salt and olive oil as accompaniments) and a snack should such a yen arise.

DRIED HERBS AND SPICES.

My kitchen is always stocked with herbs and spices. Greek oregano is more intensely flavored and sweeter than Mexican, and it is rife with essential oils that are good for you. Old-timers on Ikaria, the Blue Zone Island of Longevity where my family also happens to hail from, simmer oregano as an infusion when they feel a cold or chest congestion coming on. But oregano isn't the only herb worth having in stock. Dried basil, thyme, rosemary, marjoram, sage, and mint all lend a Mediterranean aura to almost any dish. In the spice department, I keep a spectrum of aromatic and hot spices: cinnamon (powder and sticks), allspice, nutmeg, coriander seeds, cumin, turmeric, curry, chili peppers, and pepper flakes, to name a few. I also always have a stash of Greek red saffron, aka Krokos Kozanis, as well as even more exotic Mastiha, the resinous crystal spice that is another one of the ancient superfoods of the Mediterranean. One of my favorites, too, is star anise and I usually have some on hand.



NUTS, SEEDS AND DRIED FRUITS.

Definitely part of my pantry all the time. Pistachios and almonds last longer than walnuts, which are oilier and go rancid faster. They add texture and variety to the simplest foods, such as a pot of boiled rice (think studded with Raisins, Apricots and Almonds!). I also like to have on hand sesame seeds and tahini (Sesame Paste), a good, easy-to-digest plant-based source of Calcium, and one of the seminal foods of Greek lent for that very reason. Nut butters also make a good nutritious snack. In the dried fruit department, my Greek soul goes for the figs and raisins first, but apricots and prunes are also good to have on hand as snacks or additions to all sorts of dishes. Try adding the latter, chopped up, to lentils. You'll think you're eating meat!

HARD CHEESES AND FETA.

I keep a few chunks of hard grating cheese on hand. Parmesan is one, of course, but so is the Greek cheese kefalotyri or the large, hard fist-size balls of myzithra that you can find in Greek shops. Both are pungent and add vibrancy to so many different dishes. Feta is in another category as a brined cheese, but it has a pretty long shelf life and is a good cheese to have on hand to pair with vegetable or bean casseroles and even pasta. And I never tire of the classic feta cheese omelet, especially when seasoned with a little Greek oregano!

PRESERVED CONDIMENTS AND VEGETABLES.

In this category, a Mediterranean pantry would definitely include treats like olives, capers, and pickled vegetables like cauliflower and peppers. Sun-dried tomatoes are also a great thing to have on hand, because they have a more intense flavor than canned tomatoes and offer textural variety when added to pasta, rice or bean dishes. Roasted red peppers, pepperoncini, and preserved artichoke hearts are good standbys that will add something exotic and authentic to so many dishes.



TRAHANA.

One unusual grain product worth exploring is trahana, one of the most ancient foods in the world and made to last. It is essentially bulgur or cracked wheat cooked with milk, buttermilk or yogurt and dried into tiny granules. It has been a way to preserve dairy long before the advent of refrigeration, the world's oldest slow "fast" food – it takes just a few minutes to cook and transforms from dry granules into creamy, luscious soups and porridges that can be garnished or mixed with almost anything.

SEA SALT.

There is a world of difference between sea salt and common, iodized table salt. On a purely sensual level, sea salt just tastes a lot better. But nutritionally, it contains more trace elements and more electrolytes such as Magnesium, Calcium and Potassium. It is also less processed! If you need to replenish your electrolytes and are stuck at home, a pinch of salt in your water helps.



HONEY.

Not top of mind for many Americans, honey is, indeed, one of the most nutritious foods on the planet and Greek raw honey, so rich in antibacterial agents and antioxidants, is itself a superfood. No wonder the ancient Greeks considered it sacred!

VINEGAR.

You can use vinegar in place of fresh lemon juice in almost any dish. I usually have a variety of different vinegars red wine, sherry and balsamic—to name a few.



PASTA, RICE, BULGUR, QUINOA, COUSCOUS.

There is comfort in starch and in times of crisis we tend to gravitate toward the foods that sate our hunger and calm our worries. All of these are also carte blanche for countless toppings and sauces. Having a month's supply in the cupboard is a good idea, and now, with all the bean-based pasta products on the market, there is a lot of fun and good nutrition to be had in a simple plate of spaghetti.



VEGETABLES, CANNED OR FROZEN.

A good supply of either will get you off the starch train and help you create totally plant-forward entrees, such as braised vegetable casseroles, soups and more. I prefer frozen to canned because they taste better, but I keep a store of both. String beans, okra, carrots, and even frozen chopped onions all have a place in a well-stocked Mediterranean pantry.

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and now the recipes...



ROASTED CAULIFLOWER WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATOES AND SPICES

Makes 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

8 sun-dried tomatoes
1 medium orange, preferably organic, with rind, washed well
3 tbsp. Greek extra virgin olive oil
2 cups coarsely chopped red or yellow onions, or frozen chopped onion
2 large garlic cloves finely chopped
6 cups frozen cauliflower florets, defrosted
1 tsp. dried rosemary
Salt and pepper to taste
1/2 tsp. ground cumin or more, to taste
1/2 tsp. ground turmeric or more, to taste
1/2 tsp. curry powder or more, to taste

Preheat the oven to 375F. Lightly oil an ovenproof glass or ceramic baking pan large enough to hold the cauliflower.

Place the sun-dried tomatoes in a bowl with warm water to cover by about half an inch and let them soak for 20 minutes to soften. Remove, save the liquid, and halve or quarter as desired.

Cut the orange in quarters lengthwise and cut each quarter into small wedges, about 1/4-inch/50mm thick.

Heat two tablespoons of the olive oil in a large deep skillet over medium heat and cook the onion, stirring, until wilted. Stir in the garlic.

Place the onion-garlic mixture and cauliflower florets in the baking dish. Season with salt and pepper and mix in the orange pieces, sun-dried tomato pieces, and spices. Add the rosemary. Add the tomato water to the baking dish.

Cover with parchment then aluminum foil, or with the lid if there is one, and roast for about 35 minutes, or until the cauliflower is tender but al dente. Remove and serve.



BAKED CHICK PEA PATTIES

Chick peas have been a revered food in the Eastern Mediterranean for thousands of years. Chick peas are impressively high in protein and fiber, which makes them a filling food that actually helps lower appetite and reduce calorie intake. This easy recipe originally hails from the popular Greek island, Rhodes. It's a fun way to work with dried or canned chick peas.

If you've got some tahini on hand, you can whip that up with a bit of salt, water, lemon juice and hot sauce and serve it as an accompaniment. Greek yogurt also goes nicely with this.

Makes 6 to 8 servings

INGREDIENTS

2/3 pound dried chick peas, soaked and boiled until soft, or 3 cups canned chick peas, drained

2 cups chopped onions (frozen are fine)

4 canned plum tomatoes, drained and very finely chopped

2 tbsp. dried mint

4 to 8 tbsp. flour, or more, as needed

Salt and pepper to taste

Olive or other oil for frying

If using dried chick peas, soak them overnight or for eight hours to soften them. Place in a pot with ample water and bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer the chick peas until soft, about one hour for the hulled kind, about two for the more common supermarket-variety dried chick peas. Remove, rinse and strain. If using canned chick peas, simply drain them.

Preheat the oven to 375F and line two sheet pans with parchment paper.

Place the chick peas in a food processor and pulse on and off with the metal blade until they are coarse and mealy.

Combine the ground chickpeas together with the onion, tomato, mint, salt and pepper. Add enough flour to make a dense mass that can be shaped into individual patties.

Spread the remaining flour onto a large plate. Take about two tablespoons at a time of the chick pea mixture and shape into patties about 2 to 2 ½ inches in diameter. Place on the baking sheets and bake in a hot oven until golden on one side, about 15 minutes. Flip to cook on the other side, another 8 to 12 minutes. Remove and serve.



GREEN BEAN YIAHNI, BRAISED IN TOMATO SAUCE WITH GARLIC & HERBS

This delicious braised green bean dish is a Greek classic. Frozen green beans are a good source of nutrition and I recommend them over canned in this dish. Green beans contain Folate, Thiamin, Riboflavin, Iron, Magnesium, and Potassium. Every delicious biteful is good for you!

Makes 4 servings

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds fresh green beans, trimmed, or three 14-oz cans cut green beans, or 3 pounds frozen green beans

½ cup extra virgin Greek olive oil, plus more for drizzling

2 large yellow onions chopped, or two cups chopped, frozen onions, defrosted

2 garlic cloves minced

1 large carrot, peeled and cut into ¼-inch rings or 1 cup canned or frozen, defrosted chopped or sliced carrots

2 large potatoes peeled and cut into 1 ½ - 2-inch cubes, optional

1 whole chili pepper, optional

2 ½ cups canned whole chopped or crushed tomatoes

Salt and pepper to taste

1 tsp. dried oregano, preferably Greek

2 tbsp. balsamic vinegar

In a large pot over medium heat, warm half the olive oil and cook the onion until translucent, about 8 to 10 minutes, stirring. Stir in the garlic. Add the green beans, and toss to coat in the oil. Add the carrots, potatoes and chili pepper, if using, tomatoes, salt and pepper.

Add enough water to come about a third of the way up the contents of the pot.

Cover and simmer for 45 minutes, or until the sauce is thick and all the flavors have melded nicely. Right before removing from the heat, stir in the oregano and balsamic, and adjust seasoning with additional salt and pepper as desired.

Add the remaining olive oil.



SLOW-COOKED PEAS WITH TOMATOES AND HERBS

It's easy to eat your peas if they are cooked up in a tasty Greek stew like this. Peas contain just about every vitamin and mineral you need, in addition to a good deal of fiber. This is typically a classic springtime dish in Greece, but I make it year round, mostly with frozen peas. Canned will also work. The real secret is in the licorice-flavored star anise or fennel seeds that I like to mix into this. Either balances the peas' natural earthiness and brightens everything up.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

½ cup extra virgin olive oil,
plus more for drizzling
1 large onion, halved and sliced
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 cups canned or frozen peas
1 can plum tomatoes, with juices
Salt to taste
1 star anise or 10 crushed fennel seeds,
optional grated zest of 1 lemon

In a wide pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat and cook the onion and garlic until soft, about 8 minutes, stirring.

If using canned peas, drain them. Add the canned or frozen peas to the pot. Squeeze the plum tomatoes into the pot and add their juices. Season to taste with salt. Add enough water to come about half way up the peas. Add the star anise or fennel seeds if using.

Cover and simmer for about 40 minutes, until everything is tender and the juices almost cooked off.

Stir in the lemon zest. Remove and serve, drizzled with a little extra virgin olive oil.



BLACK-EYED PEAS COOKED WITH FROZEN SPINACH AND KALAMATA OLIVES

Nutrient-dense black-eyed peas are a great source of protein and fiber and also rich in micronutrients such as Folate, Copper, Thiamin and Iron. It is no wonder they are so beloved in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially when coupled with herbs, olive oil and greens. The addition of Kalamata olives brings everything together in this yummy dish.

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

½ pound dried black-eyed beans

¾ cup extra virgin Greek olive oil

1 large onion finely chopped or grated

3 cloves garlic finely chopped

1 pound frozen spinach, defrosted and drained in a colander, or two 13 **½** oz. cans spinach, drained

2-3 tbsp. red wine vinegar

2 tbsp. tomato paste

1 cup crushed or chopped canned tomatoes

½ cup pitted, sliced Kalamata olives

2 tsp. dried oregano, preferably Greek

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Rinse the black-eyed peas in a colander. Place in a pot with ample water and bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat, drain and place back in a pot with fresh water. (The reason for this step is to keep the black-eyed peas from turning gray when cooking.)

Bring back to a boil, cover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer for 35 – 40 minutes or until the black-eyed peas are tender and most of the water absorbed.

In the meantime, prepare the vegetables: In a large, deep skillet heat ⅓ cup of olive oil and cook the onion and garlic over medium heat, stirring, until wilted, about 8 minutes. Stir in the spinach and cook for 8 minutes.

Add the onion-spinach mixture to the black-eyed peas. Stir in the vinegar, tomato paste and tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper and continue cooking until done.

Just before removing from heat, add olives, oregano and remaining olive oil. Serve warm or at room temperature.



CLASSIC GREEK BEAN SOUP – FASOLADA

Fasolada, the national Greek bean soup and, by some accounts, the national Greek dish, despite the New World provenance of white beans, is a bowl filled with nothing but great nutrition. Navy beans, the star of this soup, are an excellent source of cholesterol-lowering fiber. In general, beans' high fiber content prevents blood sugar levels from rising too rapidly after a meal, making them great for individuals with diabetes, insulin resistance or hypoglycemia. Navy beans are a very good source of folate and manganese and a good source of protein and vitamin B1 as well as the minerals Phosphorus, Copper, Magnesium and Iron.

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 pound dried navy beans, soaked, or three 15-oz. cans
⅔ cup extra-virgin Greek olive oil
2 large onions peeled and chopped, or one 10-oz bag frozen, chopped onions, defrosted
3 medium-sized carrots, peeled and chopped, or 2 cups frozen, defrosted chopped carrots
3 celery stalks, trimmed and chopped or **1 ½** cups frozen, defrosted chopped celery
6 –8 cups water
Salt and pepper to taste
1 - 2 tbsp. vinegar or balsamic vinegar to taste

If using dried beans, soak the beans overnight. Rinse and drain them.

Heat ⅓ cup of olive oil in a large pot over medium heat and cook the onions, carrots and celery together until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the beans and toss to coat in the oil. Pour in the water. Raise the heat and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and let the beans simmer, skimming the foam off the top. Dried beans will take about two hours to cook; if using canned beans, cook for about an hour in total, or until the soup is thick and creamy.

About 10 minutes before removing from heat, add the salt and pepper. Stir in vinegar to taste. As soon as you remove the soup from the heat, stir in the remaining olive oil. Serve hot.

Notes
You can add orange zest to this soup for extra punch!



SPICED CARROT SOUP WITH KALAMATA OLIVES

Many of us grew up hearing about the importance of eating carrots, for our eyesight and more. Carrot soup has become a classic in many parts of the world, and Greek cuisine has embraced it, too. Paired with turmeric, as it is below, carrots retain more of their health-giving beta carotene. Turmeric is one of the world's superfoods, and its consumption has anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer benefits. It's great for arthritis, too!

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

10 carrots, peeled and chopped, or 6 cups frozen, defrosted chopped carrots
1 large onion, chopped, or 1 cup frozen, defrosted chopped onions
2 garlic cloves, chopped
½ cup extra virgin Greek olive oil
1 tbsp. powdered ginger
1 heaping teaspoon turmeric
1 tsp. cumin
1 tsp. dried oregano, preferably Greek
6 – 8 cups water
1/3 cup white or brown rice, as desired
Salt to taste
2 – 3 tbsp. balsamic
A few drops of hot sauce to taste
6 tsp. Kalamata olive paste, or 2/3 cup pitted Kalamata olives pureed in a blender
Olive oil for garnish
Pinch of dried Greek oregano

Heat the olive oil in a large, wide pot and add the carrots, onions, and garlic. Cover the pot, keep the heat on low, and let the vegetables cook without water for a few minutes, steaming in their own moisture. Stir in the spices and oregano, and toss all together for a minute.

Add the water to the pot. Add the rice. Season with salt. Cover, raise heat to bring the soup to a boil then lower it again, simmer for about 45 minutes, or until all the vegetables are extremely soft.

Use an immersion blender or empty the soup into the bowl of a food processor and process until very smooth. Return to the pot if using a food processor. Adjust the consistency with a little water and adjust the spices to taste. Reheat for a few minutes, and add enough vinegar to balance the acidity level in the soup. Stir in the hot sauce, if using.

Serve the soup in individual bowls, spooning in a little of the olive paste and drizzling in Greek extra virgin olive oil.



PASTA WITH CAPERS, OLIVES & TOMATOES

Capers, olives and tomatoes speak...Mediterranean. This simple sauce is versatile and may be served over all manner of pasta and even with fish or meat. I have used chick pea linguine with this classic favorite.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

½ cup extra virgin Greek olive oil,
plus more for tossing pasta
1 cup chopped fresh or frozen, defrosted onion
3 garlic cloves, minced
2 cans chopped or crushed canned tomatoes
½ cup dry white or red wine, optional
2 tsp. tomato paste
½ cup pitted green or Kalamata olive rings
⅓ cup drained capers
1 heaping tsp. dried oregano,
preferably Greek
Salt to taste
Hot pepper flakes or black pepper,
to taste, optional
1 pound chick pea or classic linguine
or spaghetti

Heat the olive oil in a large, deep skillet and cook the onion until soft and glistening, about 8 minutes, stirring. Stir in the garlic.

Add the tomatoes and bring to a simmer. Add the wine, if using, or half a cup of water. Add the olives and capers. Simmer for 20 minutes until thickened. Right before serving, season with salt and pepper flakes or black pepper. Set aside, covered.

While the sauce is simmering, cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain. Toss with 2 – 3 tablespoons of olive oil and serve with the sauce spooned on top.

Variations:

1.You can add a can of drained tuna or salmon to this to make it even heartier.

2. You can top the pasta and sauce with grated parmesan or crumbled Greek feta.



PASTA E FAGIOLE WITH A GREEK TWIST

A classic Italian recipe made Greek with traditional noodles and roasted red Florina peppers! This is a dish kids will love and a great way to get them to eat their beans.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

½ cup extra virgin Greek olive oil
1 cup chopped onion or frozen chopped onion, defrosted
⅔ cup chopped frozen carrot, defrosted
1 cup fresh or frozen chopped green bell pepper
3 garlic cloves, chopped
2 roasted red peppers, such as Florina peppers, in brine or olive oil, drained and chopped
1 ½ cups cooked black-eyed peas (either dried and cooked, frozen and steamed, or canned)
2 tsp. dried basil
1 pound wide noodles, such as Greek hilopites or fettuccini
Salt and pepper to taste

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil.

As it heats, prepare the sauce: Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat and sauté the onion and green pepper for five minutes. Add the carrot and stir for two minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook for another minute. Add the cooked black-eyed peas and toss to coat and warm through. Add the chopped roasted red pepper. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Set the mixture aside, covered, to keep it warm.

When the water comes to a boil add a generous amount of salt and cook the pasta according to package directions.

Remove and drain. Toss in the frying pan with the black-eyed pea mixture. Add the basil and remaining olive oil. Serve.



NUT-STUDDED SAFFRON RICE

This delicious, nutritious pilaf calls for almonds, Americans' favorite nut, which is packed with Fiber, Calcium, Vitamin E, Riboflavin and Niacin. Its partner in health here is the pistachio, another delicious superfood, full of vitamins and minerals, including Manganese, Phosphorous, Copper and Vitamin B6. Add a little Greek saffron and a hint of honey, and this easy rice dish will be reason enough to stay in for dinner.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

½ cup extra virgin olive oil,
6 tbsp. extra virgin Greek olive oil
2 shallots finely chopped, optional
1 ½ cups finely chopped red or yellow onion (you can use frozen)
2 garlic cloves finely chopped
1 star anise
2 cups long grain rice
1 cup fresh or frozen and defrosted shelled peas
3 ½ cups vegetable stock or water or a combination of both
½ tsp. Greek saffron, Krokos Kozanis
Salt and pepper to taste
½ cup unsalted pistachios
½ cup blanched whole almonds
1 tbsp. Greek or other honey

Heat 4 tablespoons olive oil in a large, heavy, deep skillet over medium heat and cook the shallots, if using, onion and garlic until wilted and lightly browned, about 10 – 12 minutes. About five minutes into cooking the above, add the star anise.

Add the rice and stir to coat in the olive oil. Add the stock or water and reduce heat to low. Season with salt and pepper.

Dilute the saffron in 2 tablespoons hot water and stir into the rice. Cover and simmer the rice for about 12 – 15 minutes, or until tender. Halfway through cooking the rice, gently stir in the peas.

While the rice is cooking, heat the remaining olive oil and lightly brown the nuts. Stir in the honey and a pinch of salt. Cook until the honey starts to thicken. Remove and set aside.

Serve the pilaf hot or warm in individual cups or mounds with the nuts on top.

I hope you enjoy these simple, healthy recipes.

You can find great Greek artisanal products online here: shop.dianekochilas.com

Enjoy!

Diane

