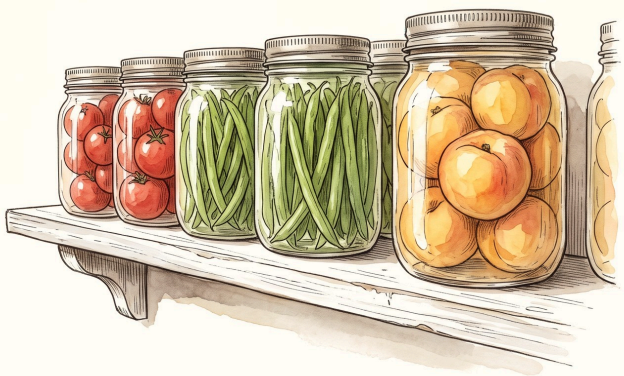
Grandma's Pantry Plan

How one Kansas pantry fed nine people for 90 days without power



BY GRANDMA JUNE

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Grandma June

MAPLE LANE BOOKS

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A Letter From June



Dear friend,

I want to tell you something before we start, so you understand why this little book means so much to me.

The ice came on the night of January ninth, nineteen fifty-nine. I was a little girl then, living with my grandmother Ruth on a wheat farm in western Kansas. Nine of us under one roof. By morning, every power line between our farm and town was lying in the snow, and it would be ninety days before a single light bulb came on in that house again. The roads stayed buried until April.

Not one of us went hungry.

It wasn't luck. It was one small room at the back of Grandma's kitchen. Cold, with no window, painted white so she could see every jar by lamplight. Her pantry.

I've spent a lot of years since then thinking about that room. I told some of its story on my channel, and so many of you wrote to me asking for more — the numbers, the recipes, the exact amounts, the plan you could actually follow this week, on your own budget, in your own kitchen. This little book is my answer to that.

It is not a book about the end of the world. Grandma never once used that kind of talk. It is a book about a pantry as a *system* — a quiet, steady, unglamorous habit that got nine people through a hard winter, and that I still use every single day of my life, seventy years later.

I'm seventy-four now. I'm not a doctor, and I'm not a prepper with a bunker. I'm just a woman who was raised right by a woman who grew up in the dust bowl and never forgot what an empty shelf feels like. Everything in this book is what I actually do, told the way I'd tell it to you across my own kitchen table.

Pull up a chair. Let's open the pantry door.

With love,

Grandma June

> **June's Tip:** Read this book once straight through for the story, then keep it on the shelf and come back to the tables and checklists whenever you're shopping or restocking. That's how I use my own notes.

Chapter 1: A Pantry Is a System, Not a Room



The first thing I need you to understand is this: a pantry is not a pile of food. A pantry is a set of habits wrapped around that food. You can hand two women the exact same shelf of groceries, and one of them will run out in six weeks and the other will stretch it to ninety days with food left to spare. The difference isn't the groceries. It's the system.

Grandma Ruth had four rules. She never wrote them down, because she didn't need to — she lived them every day of her life, and I watched her do it for years before I understood what I was watching. I've carried them with me ever since, and they are the backbone of everything else in this book.

Rule One: You Ration on Day One, Not Day Thirty

The night the power went out, my grandfather came in from the yard, looked at the wire hanging off the pole, and said, "Well, Ruth, I guess it's your show now." She didn't panic, and she didn't wait to see how bad things would get. By the second week she had already started cutting the biscuits a little smaller and stretching the bread dough with cooked oats and mashed potato. Nobody at the table even noticed. I only knew because I was underfoot in the kitchen and saw her do it.

Her reasoning was simple, and I've never heard it said better anywhere else: you ration when it still feels a little bit silly, not when you're already scared. If you wait until the shelf looks thin to start being careful, you've waited too long. The smart move always looks like overcaution in the first week and looks like genius in week eight.

> **Ruth's Rule:** You ration on day one, when it still feels silly, not on day thirty, when you're scared.

What this looks like today: the day you start building a pantry — or the day any kind of trouble starts, a storm, a job loss, anything — is the day you start being a little more careful with what you've got, even if it feels unnecessary. Cook a little smaller. Don't throw anything out. Start stretching meals before you have to.

Rule Two: You Eat From It and You Rotate It

A pantry that nobody touches is not a safety net. It's a science experiment. Grandma's beans, flour, and canned goods were in regular use every single week of the year, storm or no storm. That meant she always knew how fresh everything was, she caught problems early, and

when the emergency actually came, there was no learning curve. She already knew exactly how to cook from what she had, because she'd been doing it her whole life.

This is probably the single most common mistake I see in pantries today. People buy a big pile of food, stack it in the basement, and never touch it again until, years later, half of it has gone stale, buggy, or simply been forgotten. A pantry is not a museum. You eat from it, you replace what you use, and the oldest things always move to the front.

Rule Three: There's Always a Pot Soaking

Every single night, whether or not beans were on the next day's menu, Grandma put a pot of dried beans to soak before she went to bed. I asked her once why she did it even on nights we clearly weren't having beans. She said the worst time to decide what you're going to eat is when you're already hungry. If a pot is already soaking, you always have a real meal within an hour or two, no matter what else is going on.

> **June's Tip:** Pick one slow, cheap staple — beans, rice, oats — and make "always have some ready or soaking" a standing habit in your own kitchen, not just an emergency plan.

Rule Four: Know What Can Go Wrong

The morning my grandfather came in from the root cellar with his face gray, he'd found that the worst night of cold had frozen the top layer of potatoes — about a third of them, turned to mush by morning. That was the day I really learned what a pantry is. It isn't the food sitting on the shelf. It's knowing where everything is, how much is left, and what could possibly happen to it.

Grandma didn't waste a minute feeling sorry about it. She and my grandfather sorted every potato by hand, cooked the soft ones that same day into a giant pot of soup, and then she went and updated her inventory sheet with a new line. A problem became information, and the system adjusted.

Every single thing in your pantry has a way it can fail you: it can go stale, get eaten by bugs or mice, freeze, rot, or simply run out faster than you expected. Chapter 4 and Chapter 9 will walk through exactly what can go wrong with each kind of food, and what to do about it, so you're never caught the way my grandfather was that cold morning.

Putting the Four Rules Together

Here's the short version, the one I'd want you to remember if you forget everything else in this chapter:

1. Start being careful before you need to be.
2. Use what you have and replace it, don't let it sit.
3. Keep one cheap staple always ready to go.
4. Know, ahead of time, what could go wrong with each item — and check on it.

Everything else in this book — the tables, the recipes, the shopping plan — only works if these four habits are underneath it. Food on a shelf with no system around it is just food on a shelf. Food on a shelf with Ruth's four rules around it is ninety days of groceries for nine people in the dead of a Kansas winter.

Chapter 2: The Brown Paper



If I could hand you only one page out of this whole book, it would be this chapter.

What the Brown Paper Was

On the back of Grandma's pantry door hung a plain sheet of brown paper, held up with two nails. In pencil, she had written every single item in that pantry and how much of it she had the day the storm started. Flour, one hundred pounds. Beans, four sacks. Jars of tomatoes, forty-one.

Every few days, she'd cross out the old number and write the new one underneath. Flour, one hundred pounds. Then eighty-five. Then seventy-two. Beans, four sacks. Then three and a half. She never used a fancy notebook, never did any complicated math. She just looked, counted, and wrote.

That piece of paper is how she knew, on day twenty, that the flour was going to come up short before spring — and started stretching it with oats and potato right then, instead of waiting until the barrel was nearly empty. It's how she knew to start mixing chicory into the coffee in week one, instead of week eight, when my grandfather would have really felt the shortage. It's how she knew exactly which jars to open first, and which ones to save for March, when nothing fresh had grown in months.

> **Ruth's Rule:** You don't need a lot of stuff. You need to know, to the day, how much you have and how fast you're using it.

Here's the thing almost nobody does today: most people have no real idea how many days of food are sitting in their own kitchen. Not a rough guess — no idea at all. Grandma could tell you to the day, for every single item on that paper. That's not a special gift. That's just a habit, repeated for ten minutes, a few times a week, for her whole adult life.

How to Build Your Own Brown Paper

You don't need brown paper and two nails, though you certainly can use them if you like the charm of it. A notebook page, a clipboard, or a printed sheet taped to the inside of a cabinet door all work exactly the same way. I've included a blank version you can copy or print in the Printables section at the back of this book.

Here is the method, in four simple steps:

Step 1 — List every item you keep on hand. Go shelf by shelf. Don't skip the half-used bag of rice or the lone can in the back corner. If it's food, it goes on the list.

Step 2 — Write down how much you have right now. Weight in pounds, number of cans, number of jars — whatever unit makes sense for that item. Be honest. This is not the time to round up.

Step 3 — Update it on a schedule. I update mine every Sunday, when I do my weekly shopping and cooking anyway. It takes me about ten minutes. Some weeks nothing has changed much. Some weeks I notice I'm going through the oats faster than I thought, and I know to buy more the next trip.

Step 4 — Write the date you bought or opened each item. A permanent marker on the lid of a can, or a column on your sheet, is enough. The oldest items always go to the front of the shelf, and get used first.

A Simple Inventory Table

Here is roughly how Grandma's list looked, modernized a little. Feel free to copy this format directly, or use the blank printable version at the back of the book.

Item	Amount on Hand	Date Added	Target Amount	Notes
White rice	20 lb	—	25 lb	Rotate every 6 months
Dried pinto beans	15 lb	—	20 lb	Cook weekly
Rolled oats	8 lb	—	10 lb	—
Cooking oil	2 bottles	—	4 bottles	Don't let this run low
Canned vegetables	12 cans	—	24 cans	Date written on top
Coffee	1 can	—	2 cans	—

> **June's Tip:** The exact numbers matter far less than the habit of writing them down. A messy, honest list beats a perfect list you never update.

This single habit — the brown paper, in whatever form you keep it — is worth more than any amount of extra food on the shelf. It turns a pile of groceries into a plan.

Chapter 3: How Much Is Enough?



Everyone who writes to me asks the same question sooner or later: how much do I actually need? I want to give you real numbers, so let me say clearly what these are and what they are not.

These are planning estimates, not rules carved in stone. They're built from commonly used ninety-day planning amounts that families, church groups, and county extension offices have used for decades, rounded to numbers that are easy to shop for. Your household will eat more or less depending on age, activity, and taste. Use these tables as a starting point, then adjust based on your own brown paper after a month or two of watching what you actually use.

Chapter 4: The Twelve Shelves



This chapter is the heart of the whole book. I'm going to walk you through every single item that was on Grandma's shelves, the same twelve things I told you about on the channel, but this time I want to go deeper: why she kept each one, what I keep today in its place, exactly how to store it, roughly how long it lasts, and what it costs me, as close as I can estimate, in today's prices. All prices are in US dollars, for 2026, and they're approximate — your store and your region will vary, sometimes quite a bit.

1. Flour (and Rice)



Why Ruth kept it: Bread was not a side dish in 1959. It was the meal — biscuits in the morning, bread at noon, whatever was left went into gravy or pudding at night. Her hundred-pound barrel, milled from their own wheat, was the single largest thing in that pantry for a reason.

What I keep today: Two twenty-five pound bags of all-purpose white flour, or a mix of flour and white rice, sealed in food-grade buckets with tight lids.

How to store it: Cool, dry, dark if possible, in a sealed container that mice and pantry bugs cannot get into. A plastic bucket with a gasket lid, or heavy food-safe bags inside a bucket, works well.

Roughly how long it keeps: White flour and white rice, stored sealed, cool, and dry, keep for a very long time — commonly a year or more, often longer. Whole wheat flour goes stale and rancid much faster because of the oils in the germ, so I keep less of it and use it up quickly rather than storing a large amount long term.

Approximate cost (2026): About $12–15 for a twenty-five pound bag of flour; about $15–20 for a twenty-five pound bag of white rice.

2. The Starter (Leavening)

Why Ruth kept it: No power meant no yeast delivery, and once the baking powder can was empty, there was no more coming. Her sourdough starter — "the old man," she called it — was the only thing standing between the family and flat crackers for three months. She fed it a spoon of flour and a splash of water every single night.

What I keep today: A live sourdough starter, which you can build from nothing but flour and water in about a week for pennies. I also keep a few extra jars of active dry yeast in the freezer and a large can of baking powder as backup, because not everyone wants to fuss with a starter, and both are cheap insurance.



How to store it: A starter lives happily on the counter if fed daily, or in the fridge if fed weekly. Yeast keeps much longer in the freezer than on a shelf. Baking powder should stay sealed and dry.

Roughly how long it keeps: A well-kept starter can live for decades — some families pass them down. Frozen yeast stays good well past its printed date if kept cold and sealed. Baking powder is generally good for about a year or two once opened; test a spoonful in water for fizz if you're unsure.

Approximate cost (2026): A packet of dry yeast costs about $1–2; a large can of baking powder runs about $4–6. A starter, once built, costs nothing but a little flour each week.

3. Dried Beans

Why Ruth kept it: Dried beans don't care if it's hot or cold, don't need refrigeration, and don't spoil if kept dry and away from bugs. A single pound of dried pintos turns into roughly ten servings once cooked — astonishing value for the money, then and now.



What I keep today: About twenty pounds of dried beans and lentils — mostly pintos, with some black beans and lentils for variety.

How to store it: Sealed buckets or heavy bags, cool and dry, same as flour.

Roughly how long it keeps: Dried beans technically last for years, but the older they get, the longer they take to soften and the less pleasant they are to eat. I rotate mine — cook a batch most weeks, and buy a fresh bag when one runs low, rather than letting any bag sit for years untouched.

Approximate cost (2026): About $20–28 for a twenty pound bag of pinto beans, depending on brand and sales.

4. Oats

Why Ruth kept it: Oatmeal was breakfast four days out of seven, and it held everyone until noon even on the coldest chore mornings. Oats also stretched everything else — bread, meatloaf, gravy — when flour ran low.



What I keep today: About ten pounds of old-fashioned rolled oats.

How to store it: A sealed container, cool and dry, same general rule as flour and rice.

Roughly how long it keeps: Rolled oats keep well for a year or more sealed and dry; they can go slightly rancid over very long storage because of their natural oils, so I don't keep an enormous surplus — I buy a new canister every few months as part of my normal shopping.

Approximate cost (2026): About $8–12 for a large bulk bag of rolled oats.

Grandma's Biscuits

The first thing out of the oven most mornings, made smaller and stretched a little further as that winter went on.

Flour, shortening or lard, a splash of milk or water, and a pinch of salt and baking powder turn into breakfast in twenty minutes. Simple as that sounds, biscuits were the meal, not a side dish, at Grandma's table.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup shortening, lard, or cold butter
- 3/4 cup milk (or water, or powdered milk mixed with water)

Steps:

1. Preheat your oven, or heat a covered skillet on the stove, to a good hot temperature.
2. Mix the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a bowl.
3. Cut the shortening into the flour with a fork or your fingers until it looks like coarse crumbs.
4. Stir in the milk just until the dough comes together. Don't overwork it.
5. Pat the dough out and cut into rounds, or simply drop spoonfuls onto a greased pan or skillet.
6. Bake or cook until golden on top, about 12–15 minutes.

> **June's Tip:** No oven? These cook just fine in a covered cast iron skillet on a stovetop, flipped once halfway through.

The Old Man: A Sourdough Starter From Scratch

This is the starter Grandma kept alive on the warming shelf of her cookstove for years. It costs you flour, water, and about a week of patience.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour (any kind, though whole wheat starts a little faster)
- 1 cup water (not chlorinated, if possible — let tap water sit out an hour first)

Steps:

1. Day 1: Mix 1/2 cup flour and 1/2 cup water in a clean jar. Cover loosely with a cloth, not a tight lid. Leave at room temperature.
2. Each day for a week, discard about half the mixture and feed it with another 1/4 cup flour and 1/4 cup water, stirring well.
3. By day 5 to 7, you should see bubbles and smell a pleasant sour smell. That's a live starter.
4. Feed it daily if kept at room temperature, or weekly if kept in the refrigerator.
5. Use it in place of commercial yeast in most bread recipes, adjusting rise time, which will be longer and less predictable than with store-bought yeast.

> **Ruth's Rule:** Feed it even when you don't plan to bake. A starter that's forgotten for too long can be revived, but one that's fed regularly never lets you down.