

What to donate to a food pantry:

Listing provided by PoconoInfo:
Monroe County's Information & Referral
Line 570-517-3954
www.poconounitedway.org

Any donation is generally a good donation. But some are more helpful than others. It doesn't have to be the "healthy" version of a food – in these times we're all looking to make our donation dollars stretch as far as possible. And products that can be used by busy families with finicky kids assures they won't just sit on the shelf.

Safety is the most important part though. Make sure your donations are safe for the people who will eat them, and the volunteers who need to handle them.

All the recommendations below are non-perishable, meaning they don't need to be refrigerated or frozen and will generally keep for an extended period of time. This is because most pantries don't have refrigerators or freezers, and many only distribute once a week so things like breads can go bad before they are distributed.

A PDF listing of Monroe County Food Pantries can be found at:

<http://poconounitedway.org/get-help/>

Here are Nine Divine Food Recommendations (not all inclusive):

1. Peanut Butter. It's easy, it doesn't have to be refrigerated, and it is high in protein. Jelly is welcome too, just make sure it is in plastic jars.

2. Canned meats. Canned chicken is generally liked by everyone and it is a shelf stable high-protein food that can go in a casserole or on a sandwich. Items like canned tuna and salmon also contain vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids, and protein, but recognize that not everyone likes them. (Store-bought chicken, tuna, etc. in shelf-stable vacuum pouches that don't require refrigeration are OK too)

3. Canned Beans. Canned beans - like black beans, garbanzo beans, black-eyed peas, green beans, and pinto beans - are high in protein and fiber. Yes, we know dried beans are cheaper, but they are more difficult to prepare for many working families.

4. Canned Vegetables. Go for the basics – Corn, beans, peas. Nothing exotic. Look for low-salt versions if possible.

5. Pasta & Pasta Sauce. Any kind of pasta noodle and jars of tomato-based sauce. Avoid glass bottles for safety's sake – look for sauce in plastic bottles. Also good: Tomato sauces, paste, and diced tomatoes that can be used for other dishes.



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6. Soups. Although often high in sodium, soups like vegetable lentil, or chicken noodle are a good meal, especially in the winter.

7. Cultural favorites. These will vary by location. In some areas this may be mashed potato flakes. In others, it may be flour tortillas. Or rice. Know your community.

8. Spices. Stick to the basics, like garlic powder, minced onion, oregano, basil, salt, pepper, and cinnamon.

9. Formula and Baby Foods. Canned or powdered formula is always in need. Baby foods in jars or packets is also always needed.

MAKE SURE IT IS AT LEAST 7 DAYS BEFORE THE EXPIRATION DATE for baby food and formula before donating it!

What else should you know?

- Food pantries can often buy food at a lower cost than you can, so if you're buying food just to donate it, consider making a cash donation instead.
- Never donate rotten or moldy foods. It can contaminate the other foods that have been donated. Check for cans with deep dents or dents along the rim.
- Items that are past their "Sell By" date are OK to donate.
Items that are beyond their "Use By" date are not.
- Avoid glass bottles. They are heavy and can break.
- Only donate perishable foods if you know the pantry has the ability to safely store them (i.e. freezers or refrigerators) and that there is someone to receive them and make sure they get safely stored when donated.
- Only unopened foods should be donated. There is too much danger that open packages have been contaminated (accidentally or on purpose).
- Homemade foods are not accepted by many food pantries for the same reason opened items are not.
- Items should have the ingredients clearly listed on the packaging. Food allergies are common.



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- Bulk items (i.e. not packaged individually) may not be redistributed unless they are things like fruit or vegetables that can be individually washed by the recipient. This includes cooked items like a pan of lasagna or a bowl of broccoli. Generally, pantries are not allowed to re-package your donation unless they have a certified commercial kitchen.
- Canned food is fine – 98% of the people who visit a food pantry do have a can-opener and a way to heat foods. Not all have refrigerators though.
- Most pantries have an on-site drop off box. Call them in advance to find out how often it is checked – or how to send a cash donation if that is easier.
- Many grocery stores have donation bins near their doors. Make sure the food goes to a local pantry.

