



Helping Hands

THE FREE
COMMUNITY
PANTRY
Toolkit

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WELCOME

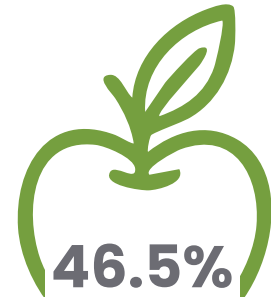
Every day, good food goes to waste while families go without. Free Community Pantries change that story.

Free Community Pantries make sharing food simple and local.

They give people a place to offer what they can and take what they need, with dignity and without barriers.



1 IN 4
Families in Alberta faces
food insecurity



46.5%
of food produced
in Canada is lost or
wasted every year,
much of it still
safe to eat.



2,500+
pantries worldwide follow
the same simple idea:
Take what you need
Leave what you can

This toolkit will help you create and care for a pantry in your own community. Inside, you'll find guidance on choosing a location, keeping food safe, building partnerships, running daily operations, winterizing your space, and keeping your community involved.

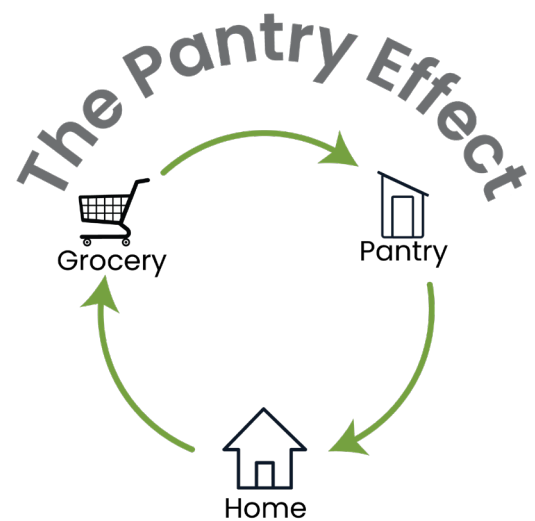
"It's simple. It's community building. And it works."

THE COMMUNITY PANTRY MOVEMENT

What starts as a small shelf or shed often becomes the heartbeat of a neighbourhood.

Community Pantries offer a simple way for people to support one another. They create a welcoming space where anyone can give, anyone can take, and everyone is treated with care.

Pantries are not charity, they're neighbours sharing resources, reducing waste, and looking out for each other.



Every pantry starts with a simple idea:

What if sharing food was easier?

When people contribute, others follow.

"A single pantry can become the beginning of something much bigger."

GETTING STARTED

A Community Pantry can begin with anyone, anywhere. With a few hands and a simple plan, you can create a space that supports your neighbourhood.

STEP 1: BUILD YOUR TEAM

Gather a small group of people who care about food access and community care.

Your team might include:

- Neighbours and volunteers
- Local businesses
- Schools or youth groups
- Community associations

Give each person a simple role: stocking, cleaning, updates, outreach. Keep it flexible and supportive.

TIP: Create a shared email so people know how to reach you.

STEP 2: CHOOSE A GOOD LOCATION

Pick a spot that is easy to find and comfortable to visit, such as a community centre, school, church, or local business.

Choose a place that is:

- Visible
- Safe
- Well-lit
- Accessible year-round

If using a fridge or freezer, ensure you have access to a power source.

GETTING STARTED

STEP 3: GET PERMISSION

Speak with the property owner or site manager and explain how the pantry works.

Confirm:

- Approval to place the pantry on-site
- Access to power if needed
- Space for volunteers to clean and maintain

A simple written agreement helps everyone stay on the same page.



STEP 4: GATHER SUPPLIES

Start with what you have.

Common supplies include:

- A small shed, pantry box, or cabinet
- Shelves or bins for organizing
- A fridge or freezer (optional)
- Basic cleaning supplies
- Clear signage

Local hardware stores and volunteers often help with materials.



GETTING STARTED

STEP 5: CONNECT WITH LOCAL HELPERS

Let people know what you are building. Many businesses and neighbours want to support community projects.

Potential helpers include:

- Grocery stores and bakeries
- Farmers and producers
- Restaurants or cafés
- Schools, churches, clubs
- Local tradespeople

Ask for small, simple contributions: surplus food, building help, or materials.

STEP 6: PLAN A SIMPLE LAUNCH

Once the pantry is built, share the news with your community.

Ideas:

- Post on local social media groups
- Ask schools and businesses to spread the word
- Invite neighbours to stop by
- Share photos of the setup

You do not need a big event. A few people and a welcoming message are enough to start.



DESIGN & BUILD YOUR PANTRY

Your pantry does not need to be fancy. It just needs to be safe, sturdy, and welcoming.

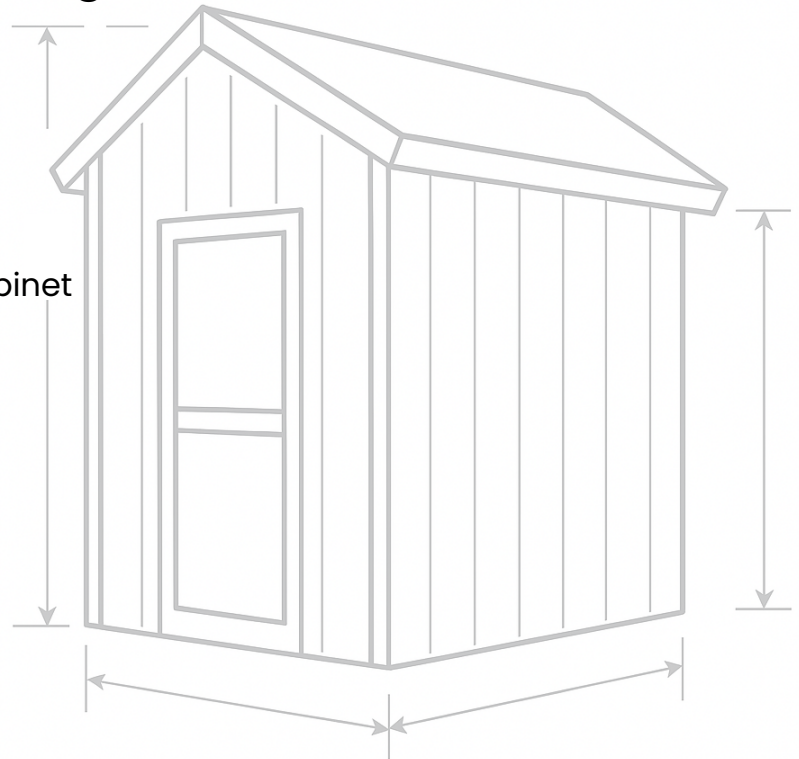
CHOOSE A SIMPLE SETUP

Common options:

- Small weatherproof pantry or cabinet
- Pantry with fridge for fresh food
- Mini curbside pantry for neighbourhood sharing

Design goals:

- Easy to open
- Sheltered from weather
- Clean and tidy
- Accessible to everyone



USE DURABLE MATERIALS

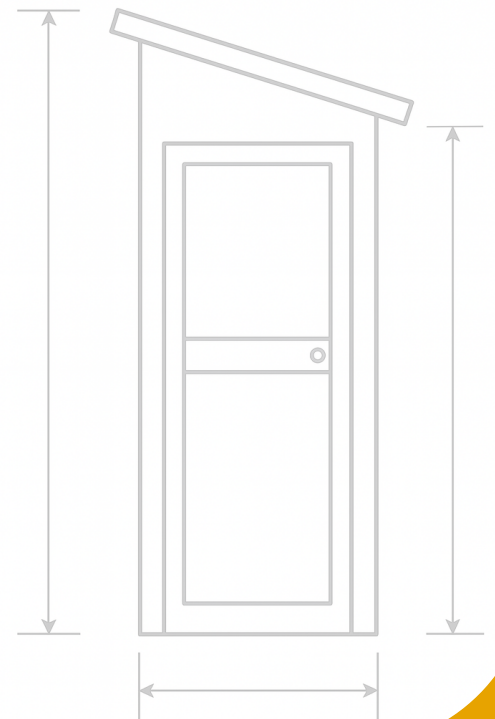
Choose materials that can handle year-round weather.

Recommended:

- Pressure-treated or composite wood
- Insulated walls if using a fridge
- Weather stripping
- Metal or vinyl siding

Avoid:

- Cardboard
- Untreated wood
- Materials that warp or crack in cold weather



DESIGN & BUILD YOUR PANTRY

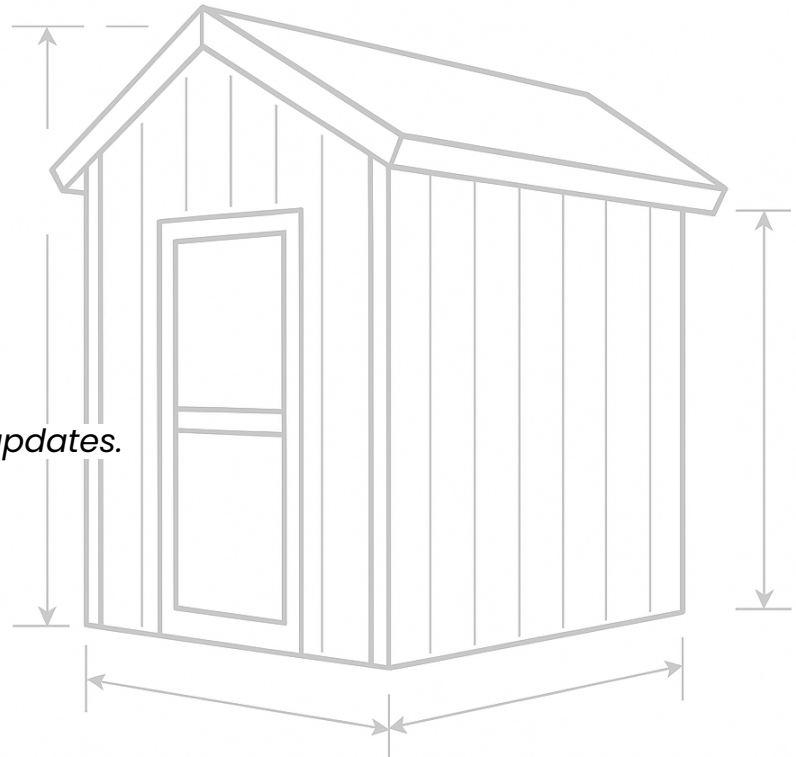
ADD CLEAR SIGNAGE

Friendly signage helps people understand how to use the pantry.

Examples:

- "Take what you need. Leave what you can."
- "Food is for everyone."
- "Please leave only sealed, labeled, and safe food."

Include a contact email or QR code for updates.

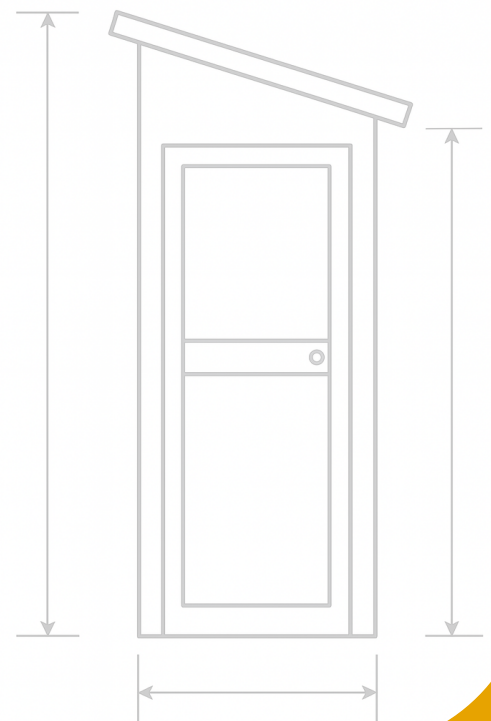


WINTER BASICS

Cold weather can affect food and equipment.

Winter tips:

- Add insulation
- Seal drafts
- Use a small safe heater if needed
- Leave space behind the fridge for airflow
- Use a "dry shelf" for items that should not freeze



FOOD SAFETY BASICS

Keeping the pantry safe is simple with a few clear guidelines.

Safe to Share:

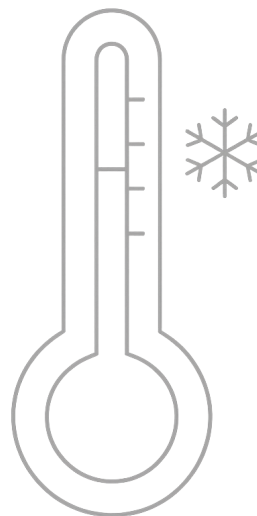
- Fresh produce
- Bread and baked goods
- Canned and dry goods
- Packaged snacks
- Store-prepared foods with labels



Not Recommended:

- Raw meat or fish
- Home-canned foods
- Unlabeled or opened containers
- Expired items
- Food with damaged packaging

When in doubt, leave it out.



Fridge and Freezer Safety:

- Fridge: **5°C or colder**
- Freezer: **-18°C or colder**

Check temperatures daily.

Cleaning Basics:

- Wipe shelves and handles
- Remove unsafe items
- Keep the area tidy
- Wash or sanitize hands before stocking



DAILY CARE & VOLUNTEERS

A cared-for pantry feels safe and welcoming.

DAILY CHECK

Look for:

- Spoiled or unsafe food
- Opened or unlabeled items
- Spills or mess
- Items needing rotation



DAILY CHECK

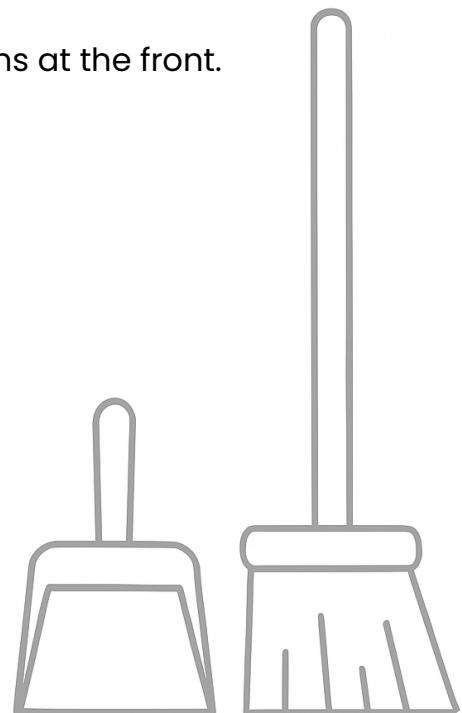
Remember to:

- Place newer items at the back and older items at the front.
- Remove anything expired or questionable.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Don't forget to:

- Use a simple rotating schedule.
- Share small tasks.
- Celebrate wins and keep things light.



SOURCING FOOD & REDUCING WASTE

Most donations will be small and frequent. Encourage people to donate what they can.

Potential Donors:

- Grocery stores
- Bakeries
- Restaurants
- Farmers
- Neighbours

Ask for simple, safe items. Encourage sealed, labeled, and fresh food items.

Reducing Waste:

- Rotate items
- Keep donation requests simple
- Share what items are most needed
- Remove anything unsafe quickly



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Keep your community involved with simple, consistent communication.

Share Updates:

- Post restocks
- Share donation needs
- Thank helpers
- Show simple moments from the pantry

Partner Locally:

Work with schools, clubs, businesses, and community groups to keep momentum going.

Keep It Welcoming:

Use friendly language and clean spaces to help everyone feel comfortable.



THANK YOU

Thank you for building a Community Pantry and helping create a more caring, connected, and food-secure community. Small actions make a real difference, and your effort helps ensure that everyone has access to good food.



"The people we help truly are blessed, but I am convinced that the people who give are blessed even more."

-Terrance Haxton, Director Emeritus & Founder,
Helping Hands Society of Cochrane and Area

A small community pantry can change a neighbourhood.
A network of them can change the world.

Thank you for helping make food access
sustainable and barrier-free.



"Take what you need. Leave what you can."

Learn more about Helping Hands Society of Cochrane and Area:

Made possible by



helpinghandscochrane.ca

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