Making Life Easier with Your Pantry Shelves

I subscribe to the "pantry principle," where I estimate my family's consumption rate of an item and stock up about a month's worth of nonperishables and long-life products.

Cereals and Starch	
Oatmeal (old fashioned)	Box cereals
Rice (brown & white)	Pasta (linguine, macaroni, etc)
Taco shells	
Dairy	
Dried or powdered milk (for baking, waffles, pancakes, sauces, etc.)	Evaporated milk in can
Nut milk (coconut, almond, cashew)	Dried butter
Canned protein	
Chicken	Tuna
Soup	Beans (black, kidney, pinto, navy, etc.)
Canned Fruit	
Pineapple	Peaches
Blueberries	Oranges
Dried Fruit	
Raisins	Currants
Oils and vinegars	
Vegetable oil	White vinegar

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Flavoring sweet	
Sugar (brown, white)	Syrup
Jam/Jelly	Molasses
Flavoring salty	
Soy sauce	Salt
Seasonings (Mexican, Italian, Chinese)	Teriyaki sauce
Canned vegetables	
Tomatoes (sauce, diced, whole, stewed)	Corn (whole and creamed)
Pumpkin	Olives
Baking	
Flour	Spices
Baking soda	Baking powder
Drinks	
Coffee	Powdered flavor drinks
Cocoa	Tea
Non-perishable	
Tissues	Paper towels
Dishwasher soap	Dishwashing liquid
Trash bags	Toilet paper
Plastic wrap	Tin foil
Bottled water (for emergency use)	Zipper plastic freezer bags
Disposable litter boxes	Food
Floss	Soap
Feminine products	Toothpaste

Rules of Thumb to Manage Paper

Where does all the paper come from? And why do I keep all this documentation? Probably 20% of the bills I get are incorrect. Taxes need to be verified for several years after.

For easy retrieval when needed, here is my organization system. Start with three boxes (or piles) labeled: incoming, action, and to file. If you are all digital, this same flow can apply to online documents. Here are some suggested folder labels:

- Housing (rental agreement, expenses, mortgage, insurance)
- Utilities (heat, electricity, water, cable, Internet, phone)
- Taxes (property taxes, excise taxes, estimated income tax payments, donations)
- Banking and retirement
- Car (payments, leases, maintenance costs)
- Sales receipts
- Medical insurance
- Medical costs (out of pocket)
- School papers

How long should you hold on to documents?

Most receipts and statements can be retrieved online from the vendor should you need to reference the expenditure. However, a few documents should be kept for easier reference. For annual expenses, the easiest thing is to keep them all and once taxes are filed, toss all the expense statements and receipts. Exceptions are:

- Receipts for high-ticket items you may need to produce for repair or return
- Receipts for tax deductible items
- Receipts from home improvement expenses (for seven years after house sale)

For tax filings:

Keep for seven years past the tax year along with any supporting documentation such as deductible items and home improvement expenses.