

How To Make Your Kitchen More Efficient

By Amy Hammond

If you feel as if you are embarking on a scavenger hunt every time you start to cook a meal, it could be time for kitchen reorganization.

Many people set up their kitchens based on how they assume it should be rather than what will work best for their lifestyle. If your family is constantly on the go and you rarely sit down for meals together, a strategically placed island with a counter and bar stools could be a smart investment. Most islands also have a variety of storage features such as shelves, spice racks, drawers and bins. If you don't have room for an island a rolling storage cart is handy for holding cutlery, linens, condiments, placemats and any other items you choose.

To make your kitchen more efficient, you first need to take inventory of all the equipment and accessories you own and then determine what you use most often. Go through all your cabinets and drawers and get rid of anything you haven't used in years. Donate it or sell it in a garage sale and you'll instantly have more storage space. Items that are used infrequently such as punch bowls, serving trays, turkey platters, etc., can be stored in higher cabinets or in a sideboard in the dining room. Heavier items such as cast iron skillets, woks, and tabletop grills should be stored in cabinets beneath the countertop.

Are cereal and pasta boxes hogging space in your cupboards? Cut down on the clutter and save space by storing them in see-through plastic square containers. You can free up additional space by installing spice racks and wastebaskets inside cabinets. Rubbermaid offers a plethora of space expanding products to give you additional room in your cabinets such as lazy susans, a condiment caddy, dish racks and turntables for storing canned goods.

Most kitchens end up with a junk drawer that includes malfunctioning can openers, dull knives, garbage bag ties, potato peelers, egg timers, etc. Go through your junk drawer and toss out everything that isn't useful. Assemble the gadgets you want to keep and place them in plastic boxes or sandwich bags to keep them organized.

Finding room for cookware can be a challenge in a small kitchen. Try installing a ceiling rack or an above-the-range rack where pans hang from practical hooks. Inexpensive shelves installed on

a bare wall can hold jars of beans and pasta, collector plates or decorative teapots. A shelf above the doorway is a great spot for stashing cookbooks and a recipe box.

Think about the way you cook and arrange equipment and tools so you don't have to scramble to find things while you are cooking. Place cooking utensils that you use most frequently in an easy-to-clean container near the stove so you can reach them easily. Store knives in a wooden block or in a holder attached to the wall. Try to keep your countertops as free of clutter as possible so you have more space for food preparation. Less clutter on countertops also makes your kitchen easier to clean.

Use colorful antique tins or attractive jars for storing sugar, teabags, popcorn and cookies. Sturdy wicker or rattan baskets will keep your vegetables and fruits dry and protected while adding visual interest to your decor. Store your silverware in a drawer near the dishwasher or sink so it can be put away easily after washing. Discount and hardware stores carry plastic cutlery trays that fit most standard size drawers.

Take advantage of glass doors in cabinets to display your most beautiful plates, glasses and bowls. Use cup hooks inside cabinets to keep coffee cups and teacups organized and protected. Plate racks offer easy storage and help protect your plates from chipping. Avoid placing decorative items near the stove where they will accumulate dirt and grease. If you have the wall space for it, a hutch can hold china, serving pieces, pitchers, glasses and more. Many furniture makers offer beautiful hutches to match any decor or you can purchase one at an unfinished furniture store or flea market and paint it yourself.

Modern kitchens are a multi-purpose gathering area for the family. Consider adding a corner table and chair that can be used for writing notes, working on crafts, sorting through recipes, or paying bills. A corkboard can serve as a place for posting schedules, messages and children's artwork. If you spend a lot of time in the kitchen consider installing an under-cabinet TV or radio/CD player so you can listen to the news or your favorite program while you prepare meals.