

How To Remodeling Your Kitchen On A Budget

By Carl Turner

For a long time now, the most popular home remodeling projects have been kitchens and bathrooms, and that's still the case. However, there are such a huge variety of products now available for kitchens (and baths) at such wide price ranges that your simple kitchen update can turn into an elaborate and expensive proposition. If you don't have all the money in the world to spend on the ultimate cooking and eating environment, but still would like your kitchen to be more attractive, convenient, functional and perhaps even add value to your home, you can still redo a number of elements that will enhance both the time you spend in the kitchen and your home's eventual resale value.

At the top of the list of things you can do to upgrade your kitchen is to replace the countertops. Your current 1970s Formica wonder can be traded out for any number of materials. Most popular these days is granite or other stone surface, followed by tiles, stainless steel, solid surfacing (such as Corian) wood and yes, even Formica. Stone has the advantage of being low maintenance and durable. Its disadvantage is cost -- \$20 a square foot and up, up, up is not out of the question. Soapstone and other more porous counter materials can be unusual choices. They often require sealing or oiling and can have an irregular appearance that some find more attractive than others. Many daring homeowners are now looking at concrete, for which the variety of colors and finishes is almost endless, which can be custom poured to whatever configuration exists in your kitchen and, compared to higher end stone choices like granite, or even solid surfacing, is relatively inexpensive. One of the biggest advantages of solid surfacing materials is that they're impervious to mold, mildew and bacteria, they're resistant to stains and they are seamless, which eases cleaning. Of course, color choices are endless and since the color goes right through the material, scratches can be easily smoothed out with heat or buffing.

Okay, so you've got the beautiful concrete counters you always wanted and you find you've still got a little bit of money left over in your budget. What do you buy? Well, new hardware and fixtures can do a lot to upgrade a kitchen. A new faucet or whole sink setup -- huge soapstone or enamel or even copper farmhouse sinks are now popular -- with a faucet with integrated spray, water filter or hot water for cooking, and new cabinet and drawer handles can freshen your kitchen's look.

Of course, if you've got a little bit more money, new appliances, particularly built-ins, can totally transform your kitchen from drab to fab and increase its utility as well. Some popular items are "professional" ranges, cook tops, hoods and ovens in stainless steel or with panels that match kitchen cabinetry. Dual dishwashers are the latest trend, along with refrigerator and freezer drawers built into cabinetry. An indoor grille has also become almost a requirement in the modern kitchen, meaning that high-tech ventilation is also a necessity.

If your money runs out before you can get to the appliance store, or if your appliances are already up-to-date, take a serious look at your kitchen cabinetry. From painting or refinishing to simply refacing or replacing the cabinet fronts and doors (a very popular and less expensive alternative to completely replacing cabinets), redoing kitchen cabinetry is probably the most dramatic thing you can do to change the look of your kitchen. Popular these days are European-style sleek enamel cabinet fronts in bright, eye-popping colors or, on the other end of the spectrum, cabinets designed to look like freestanding furniture – kitchen islands with turned legs, glass fronted upper cabinets, bead-board interiors and display lighting. Your local home store will be able to provide you with a multitude of choices, and probably even the labor, for any kitchen cabinetry project from replacing doors and hardware to totally redesigning your kitchen layout.

Another high impact choice for a kitchen upgrade is redoing the floor. From that tacky old linoleum you can trade up to hardwood, wood laminate and other "faux" woods, stone, tile and even fabulous new linoleums. Today's modular wood flooring can make having a beautiful and durable wood or wood-look (often called Pergo flooring after the European brand name) floor in your kitchen less expensive than you think.

Another thing not to ignore in your kitchen facelift is your lighting scheme. If you've got the old fluorescent light hidden by a plastic panel in a drop ceiling, you've got a lot of wonderful options in new low voltage halogen task lighting, chandeliers, display lighting, under-counter lighting and hundreds of other choices designed to both enhance your kitchen's appearance and make working and playing there easier for all.

Finally, don't forget that color and finish is a major factor in your kitchen. Even a good coat of paint, an interesting paint and wallpaper scheme or the addition of inexpensive cove moldings and wainscoting can change a kitchen's appearance for the better. And no matter what you do, make sure that you hire reputable contractors and use the best materials because, even though you want a kitchen upgrade on the cheap, you don't want a cheap kitchen.