

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

Fall 2007

Organizing Your Kitchen

Is your kitchen the hub of your home? No matter if it's a majestic chef-worthy space or a small, simple galley-style kitchen, it's probably a place where you not only prepare and eat meals, but also a spot to do homework or pay bills, work on projects, and spend time chatting with family and friends.

With all that activity, chaos can ensue. But if you can't stand the heat, don't get out of the kitchen. Just get organized! This newsletter shares great tips to get your kitchen in tip-top shape — starting with a basic decluttering session and followed by some simple organizing techniques. Bon appetit!

Start by sorting



The first steps to effective organizing — long before you run out to buy cute containers — are sorting and decluttering. Although this can take a little time (and make a bit of a mess), it's well worth the effort to do it right the first time. Set aside a

half day to pull EVERYTHING out of your cupboards and drawers (yes, even the never-used ice-cream maker on the top shelf), and start sorting into categories. Use your table, countertops, and floor to group similar things, or use laundry baskets or cardboard boxes to contain the groupings. (It may be helpful to tackle food/pantry items on a separate day, so pull those out now and set them aside.) Some of your categories may include: everyday dishes (including your mug collection); special occasion dishes; Tupperware®; cutlery; utensils; pots and pans; baking items; mixing bowls; and seasonal/infrequently used items (turkey roasting pan, crock pot, rice cooker).

Once you've sorted everything, go through each category. You might be surprised to see that you have duplicates of many items! Set limits for yourself and be realistic about what you use regularly. Ask yourself if you really need and use each item. Do you need three potato peelers? Never use your wok or fondue pot? Out they go! Toss anything you don't use or love into a donation box, and send it off to your favorite charity. Now, you're ready to store what's left in a functional and convenient manner.

Creating a functional kitchen

STEP ONE: ANALYSIS

As you ponder where to place your kitchen things, begin by analyzing your old storage systems. Were some things working well? If so, don't change them! If you love storing your mugs by the coffee maker, stick with it. If it's convenient to have your recipe books on the countertop, keep it up.

Now ponder anything inconvenient. How could you make those things work a little better? For example, if you hate having piles of cans and bottles littering your countertop as they await a trip outside for recycling, then make a new plan. Clear space under the sink to install a pull-out trash can to capture those recyclables immediately after use. If you hate reaching to the top shelf to get your favorite, frequently-used mixing bowls, make a plan to house them in a more convenient location like an eye-level shelf. Where you put your stuff is as important as what you own. If you can't find it when you need it, or it's inconvenient to reach, you'll likely not use it!

STEP TWO: PLACEMENT

As you look over your groupings of kitchen items, start pulling aside the things you use most often. Then store them where you use them. For example, your everyday dishes might work great directly above your dishwasher or close to the table. Perhaps your pots and pans and cookie sheets could go near the stove.

Keeping similar things together will help you navigate your kitchen more easily. For example, store everything related to cooking in one area. You might group your pots and pans, bakeware, hot mitts, and cooking utensils in one area. Create a food preparation area by grouping cutting boards, knives, and mixing bowls. If you love to bake, consolidate cookie cutters, mixers, measuring cups and spoons in one area.

There are many helpful organizing products available to keep your kitchen orderly. Baskets and bins come in a variety



of sizes and hold foods, like onions and potatoes, as well as cleaning supplies. A wall-mounted spice rack saves cupboard space. Inside cupboards, double-decker wire shelf stackers double storage space. Wooden cookware racks keep pot lids tidy. An attractive vase or crock near your stove top corrals utensils.

If you use something frequently, keep it close and convenient. Put infrequently used items way up high, down low, or in the back. Place anything you use daily (such as everyday dishes) at eye level, so you're not stooping down or reaching on tip-toe. Keep heavy things down low and lighter things up high. For example, if you use your turkey platter or punch bowl only once or twice a year, place them on a bottom shelf.

STEP THREE: MAINTENANCE

Once your kitchen is organized, pat yourself on the back. Job well done! But you're not quite finished... Establish an "in/out" system where some purging takes place before you purchase a new item. If you buy a new set of plastic storage containers, toss out an equal amount of your old Tupperware®. If you come home with a new mug, an old one must go! It may be helpful to stash a donation box somewhere nearby as an easy reminder of this rule. Also, take time once each year to review your kitchen and all its accouterments. Discard anything broken, donate anything unused in the past 12 months, and make sure the storage systems still make sense for you and your housemates. Consider your kitchen a work in progress, and like fine wine it will only get better with time.

Food storage 101

- Most unopened canned goods and jars will last up to a year. Evaluate your inventory and use up those about to expire. Toss anything beyond its freshness date.
- Consider transferring staples like sugar, flour, rice, cereal, and oatmeal to plastic storage containers. You'll keep food fresher longer, and the uniformly sized containers make your shelves look neat and organized.
- Make like a grocery store: Group canned goods (vegetables, fruits, beans, tomato products), baking essentials (baking soda and powder, salt, vanilla), pastas, and snack foods (crackers, chips, and cookies) in designated spaces.
- Keep a basket of healthy, kid-friendly snacks down low so little ones can help themselves. Try granola bars, dried fruit, mini applesauce containers, and juice boxes.

Create a magazine-worthy kitchen in minutes

- Eliminate refrigerator magnets. They seem to multiply when you're not looking! Clear off ALL of them, and wait 30 days. If you still miss any of them, you may then bring back only those specific ones you recall missing.
- Just because the space is there doesn't mean you have to fill it. It's refreshing to leave spaces partially empty.
- Place a simple bouquet of flowers or a small potted plant in the center of the table. It will look so nice you won't be tempted to let clutter take over.
- Wash dishes as you dirty them. Don't let any accumulate in the sink, on the counter, or anywhere else.
- Before you begin your meal preparation, clear the counters and light a candle. It's much more fun to cook in a serene setting than in chaos.
- Use your good dishes and linens for everyday. They're beautiful, so why save them for only special occasions?



Recipe relief

Are your cookbooks a recipe for disaster? Take control with these simple tips.



Evaluate and pare down: Gather all your cookbooks in one spot. You'll recognize your favorites, so set those aside. Then, consider donating any books unfamiliar or unused for the past year.

Find a central location: Keep all cookbooks and recipes in one area for easy access and awareness. Organize in a way that makes sense to you, such as by author, culinary region, or type of food (vegetarian, soups, breakfast, etc.)

Create a recipe binder: Set up a three-ring binder for your recipe clippings. Create sections (such as main course, veggies, salads, desserts) with tab dividers. Glue recipes on both sides of heavy 8-1/2 x 11 paper, and then slip the papers into clear plastic page protector sleeves.

Organize clippings: It's tempting to clip every great recipe you see in magazines. If you do, create a "holding" envelope where recipes must pass your taste test before being added to your recipe binder. Remember the "in/out" rule: Each time you add a recipe to your book, remove an old one (or two) that is no longer a favorite.

De-junk the junk drawer

Is your junk drawer full of — well — junk? Nearly everyone has one, but some are more useful than others. Here's how to whip yours into an organized and functional space.

Take everything out and start tossing. Junk drawers are notorious for accumulating the stuff you keep “just in case” or which doesn't have a designated “home.” Discard unidentifiable keys, screws, and nails. Out go old pens, scraps of paper with scribbled phone numbers, crumpled receipts, and expired coupons.

Group what's left into categories. Usually, you'll end up with office supplies (pens, stickie notes, tape, glue, rubber bands, scissors); fix-it supplies (hammer, screw driver, small tin of nails); and a few other odd bits.

Purchase a drawer divider (you can find plastic or wood versions at your local discount store or online) or simply reuse some small cardboard boxes to separate and contain your junk drawer's contents. (Check boxes work great!) Small mint tins work well to hold everything from paper clips to nails, stamps to coins. Label them for easy storage and retrieval.

Use your junk drawer with caution. When you're about to toss in something, ask yourself if it should really go elsewhere (like the trash can or another room). If it belongs in the junk drawer, then immediately place it in the right section of the drawer so you can find it when you need it.

