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Kitchen Organization: When everything has a place, it's easier to put everything in its place

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The kitchen is a room that all family members use every day -- yet so often it is one of the most inefficient rooms in the house. Life in the kitchen is much easier when you can find what you're looking for and you know what food is in the cupboard or pantry.

Here are a few tips to encourage and help you to create an enjoyable kitchen:

- Neatly stored items take up less space.
- Organize your kitchen so that the everyday dishes, silverware and glasses are close to the sink and/or dishwasher.
- Coffee mugs ... how many do you really need? Think about those you use most often and how much space the rest consume.
- Square and rectangular containers take up less space than round ones.
- Go through cupboards and pantries once a year and toss what has not been used in a year.
- Don't buy products in bulk unless you have a place to store them.
- Small appliances that you use often should be accessible. If you need to make room for them, it might help to relocate appliances that you don't use often to hard-to-reach places.
- Put canned goods with canned goods and boxes with boxes, etc. Break each down by category, such as fruits, vegetables, soups, beans, pasta, snack foods, etc.
- Install slide-out drawers in cupboards for easily access to pots, pans, plastic containers, etc.
- Can't install slide-out drawers? Use clear plastic boxes that can hold similar items, such as pasta, rice, snacks, baking goods. That way you can pull them all off the shelf at one time to find what you need.

With just a few hours of time and some products to help you organize, you'll be well on your way to a kitchen in which you can enjoy spending time.

It's amazing the number of kitchen-organizing products available to help you control kitchen clutter -- too many to mention all of them here. Some of my favorites are listed below. You might even find uses for them in other areas of your home.

Turntables -- Available in a variety of sizes, materials and colors, turntables are one of the best ways to organize bottles, jars, cans, spices -- anything you don't want to get shoved to the back of the cupboard.



Use a large one under your kitchen sink for your cleaning supplies, so you don't have to crawl under your sink looking for them, or put one in that cabinet above the refrigerator to reach those hard-to-reach items -- without having to climb on a stool. They also work wonders in upper-corner cabinets.

Try putting two side by side if necessary and don't worry about not being able to see all of the turntable -- just give it a spin and you'll see the rest.

Turntables also work well in large medicine cabinets or in laundry rooms for cleaning supplies.

Tea bag storage -- Wouldn't it be great to be able to offer your guest several varieties of tea without having to dig for all of the tea boxes? Just place some of each of your favorites into a container and impress your guests.

Three-tier expanding shelf -- Never sure if you have tomato soup on hand to go with a grilled cheese sandwich? Use an expanding, tiered shelf to solve the mystery. It's like having a set of bleachers for your canned goods and spices.



Drawer organizer strips -- Sometimes it can be a challenge to find an organizer that fits the dimensions of your drawer exactly. You can customize your own drawer using drawer organizer strips, and they can certainly be used in other drawers around the house, such as in the bathroom, craft room or laundry room.

If you prefer the drawer organizer insert, or modular inserts, and you find that you have extra space in the drawer -- you can place a small strip of wood between the inserts and the back of the drawer to keep the inserts from moving around. Or, place a drawer organizer strip horizontally across the back of the drawer to keep the inserts from moving.

Tip: Divide up drawer space so that kitchen gadgets and utensils you use less often are not mixed in with the ones you use daily.

Drawer doubler -- Maximize the space in your drawers with a drawer doubler. It's adjustable to fit the width of your drawer and has individual compartments. It's perfect for use in a kitchen junk drawer -- who said your junk drawer needed to look junky? It also works well in the drawer that contains all your kitchen utensils.



Plastic grocery bag holder -- Not only useful in the kitchen, but also a must for the laundry room if you use grocery bags to clean out the litter box. They also are useful in the bathroom under the sink. Mount the holder on the insides of doors, pantries or on the wall -- or buy one that sits on a flat surface.

Tip: Resist the urge to keep every bag -- there will always be more!

Tray divider -- These dividers are simple to install and help separate the cookie sheets, baking pans, cooling racks, cutting boards, cupcake tins, serving trays -- even your paper grocery sacks. Use them in a lower cupboard or in the cabinet above the refrigerator -- spaces that are hard to use.



Microwave plate cover -- Tired of cleaning your microwave after food explosions? Cover your leftovers with a plate cover. To ensure that all family members use it, store it in the microwave so that in order to cook, you must move the cover first.



Clear packet storage -- Excellent for allowing you to quickly put your hands on sauce, soup or drink mixes. They come in a variety of sizes and can either sit on a shelf or affix to the door of a cupboard or wall in the pantry.

Plastic lid holder -- Do the plastic lids from your storage containers drive you nuts because you're never sure what to do with them? Install a door-mounted plastic cover holder and never wonder again where the lid to your container is. If this product won't solve your problem, use one of the larger plastic containers to store the lids in.

Under-shelf place mat holder -- Not enough drawer space to hold place mats or cloth napkins? Attach a place mat holder to a shelf and you have an instant space for those items. It also works great for storing



cookie sheets, cutting boards or even large serving platters.

Magnetic spice rack -- These stylish spice-holder units can be mounted on the wall for quick access. If you are short on cupboard space but have a lot of unused wall space in a pantry -- these may just be the spice organizer for you.

It is recommended that you keep your spices and seasonings in a cool, dry, dark location to maintain optimum freshness. These convenient little containers are also the perfect organizing tool for offices for paper clips, push pins, rubber bands, etc. And don't forget the craft room.



Last but not least, be sure to take an honest look at what you are storing in your kitchen. Ask yourself: "When was the last time I used this?" "Will I ever use it again?" If the answer is "I can't remember" or "No," it might be time to let it go and make room for what you use every day.

Product sources

- Each of the products mentioned was found online at www.containerstore.com.
 - Some of them also can be found online at www.organize.com.
 - Retail stores where some or all are carried include: The Container Store, Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, Linens 'n Things, Storables.
- Laura Leist is the founder and president of eliminatechaos.com. You can reach her through her Web site.