

The Basics

Get Organized

Savvy kitchen storage and planning can maximize your cooking efficiency

by LAURA REILEY

It may be possible to be too rich or too thin, but few serious home cooks would argue with having too much storage or counter space. Still, even the smallest galley kitchen can yield magnificent meals. With a little reshuffling of utensils and appliances and a few thoughtful purchases of items that will help you organize, any kitchen can be outfitted—without remodeling—to make your cooking really sizzle.

Perform an Appliance Purge

EVERY COUNTERTOP APPLIANCE STANDS BETWEEN YOU AND MORE WORK SPACE. Because kitchen organization should accommodate your lifestyle and cooking techniques, assess the frequency with which each appliance is used. The toaster springs into action every morning. It stays. The mammoth stand-up mixer is called upon twice a year when you make your famous wheat bread. Stow it.

Evaluate the necessity of other items that typically clutter the countertop. Decorative canisters for flours and sugars add a pretty touch, but if they aren't wide enough to dip a cup measure

into, you'd be better off storing baking materials in stackable airtight plastic containers with wide mouths. (Using a strip of masking tape, mark the contents and most recent purchase date on the side of each container for easy viewing.)

Define Your Work Spaces

THE MESSIEST CHOPPING SHOULD BE DONE NEAREST THE SINK. Let's call this area the primary work space. Buy the biggest cutting board you can find for this space, bearing in mind that it should not be too large to be easily washed in your sink. A sizable cutting board will leave plenty of room for knife



James Carrier



FANCY OILS, VINEGARS, AND SAUCES ARE IN A HANDY SPOT NEAR THE STOVE—AND THEY LOOK PRETTY, TOO. KEEP SALT IN A BOWL FOR EASY PORTIONING.

Technique

What should go where?

These guidelines will help you maximize space and efficiency around the sink, stove, and refrigerator—the key triangle of kitchen activity.

BY THE SINK

To maximize space near the sink, buy the smallest dish drainer you can get away with. If you don't have a dishwasher, it should, of course, accommodate a whole dinner's worth of dishes; if you have a dish-

washer, a dish drainer need only hold a small mid-project load of dishes. Buy an extra perforated utensil cup for the dish drainer to hold scrubby pads, bottle brushes, or other washing tools.

If the sink does not have a

garbage disposal, keep a wide-mouth, sealable plastic container nearby to hold peelings and scraps for compost. (If your primary work space is far from the sink, this clipping container should travel with you.) Dish towels and paper towels should be accessible near the sink, not inside a cupboard, so that dirty hands don't soil cupboard doors while in search of relief.

BY THE STOVE

Mise en place—a French term referring to having all of a recipe's ingredients pre-assembled for cooking—is most important when the heat is on. You should have as many items as possible arranged mise en place when you start work at the stove. To make it easier to have things at the ready, keep your spices and dried herbs as near to the stovetop as possible, but away from direct or rising heat—spices' essential oils are lost through repeated heating and cooling. Spices can be organized simply by alphabetizing them, but it is often more helpful to group them by function: For exam-

ple, place nutmeg, allspice, cinnamon, and other dessert spices and extracts together.

Many professional chefs keep a shelf of oils, vinegars, and unrefrigerated sauces on the wall near the stove. If the bottoms get sticky or gooey, line the shelf with foil or a paper bag that can be changed when it gets too dirty. A pepper mill should be close at hand; salt is easier to portion when it's kept in a small bowl next to the stove top rather than in a shaker. You might also find it's more efficient to place spoons and spatulas in a jar on the counter, rather than in a drawer.

BY THE REFRIGERATOR

The countertop area to either side of the refrigerator should be reserved for things removed from the refrigerator, so you won't have to wander about looking for a place to set them down. The cupboards that flank the refrigerator should be devoted to glassware—juice glasses, beer mugs, wineglasses, highball glasses—because cold drinks are most often poured directly from the refrigerator into a glass. (If you drink from the tap, it may be more efficient to keep glasses by the sink.)

movement and scraping chopped foods to the side, minimizing accidents and cutting down on the number of times the cutting board needs to be emptied.

Whether it's plastic or wooden (both have their merits, although pungent smells can be removed from plastic more easily), a cutting board should be "anchored" to the countertop during use by a flat, slightly damp towel to cut down on slippage. Cutting boards should be stored vertically to prevent warping or bacterial growth (try storing them in a tall cupboard).

Knives and often-used tools should be kept near the primary work space. Big knives can be safely stored in a block or in a drawer outfitted with dividers. High-quality knives should not be stacked (stacking can cause nicks or rust if knives are ever stored damp). A wall-mounted magnetic strip is a handy way to store paring knives, peelers, zesters, and other small metal utensils.

EXTRA ROOM FOR A SECONDARY WORK SPACE? CREATE A BAKING AREA.

If small utensils are kept in drawers, divide them by function: Pastry brushes and pie weights with baking tools,

meat thermometer with other roasting utensils.

A secondary work space may be designated as a baking area (if you run out of counter space, you can set up a utility cart). The space should be wide and deep enough to allow for rolling out dough. This means it should accommodate the width of your rolling pin and some arm room in either direction. Baking equipment should be stored above or below this space; bear in mind that heavy items (glass mixing bowls, casseroles) are easier to hoist up from a low cabinet than to lift down from a high cabinet.

Baking sheets, wire cooling racks, tart pans, springform pans, and other baking supplies should be stored such that the most frequently used items are at the front of the cupboard. Devote a nearby drawer to parchment paper, waxed paper, plastic wrap, and aluminum foil. Remember that some baking utensils such as rolling pins and sifters are best not washed (remove dough from a rolling pin with a dry paper towel; bang out excess flour from a sifter). For your sanity's sake, set aside one shelf in the baking area for storing these items.