

EFFICIENCY PLAN

Get Organized

It doesn't take a full-scale renovation to make your kitchen work better.

By CLEA SIMON

Call it the kitchen space-time continuum: The less space you have, the more time you spend looking for that one thing – a knife, a grater, or special mixing bowl – that you just know was there yesterday. Even if you're not ready for a complete rehab, there are ways of making the most of the space, and the time, that you do have in the kitchen.

First, assess your counters. How often do you use that blender or food processor that's taking up valuable space? Any countertop item that's not getting used at least twice a week hasn't earned its real estate, says professional organizer Sue Bohenko, proprietor of North Andover's So Organized and a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers. Put little-used appliances into an upper cabinet or even into storage in another part of the house, she says. Then figure out which things, like electric can openers or microwaves, can be mounted beneath a wall cabinet, a solution that will free up counter space and still



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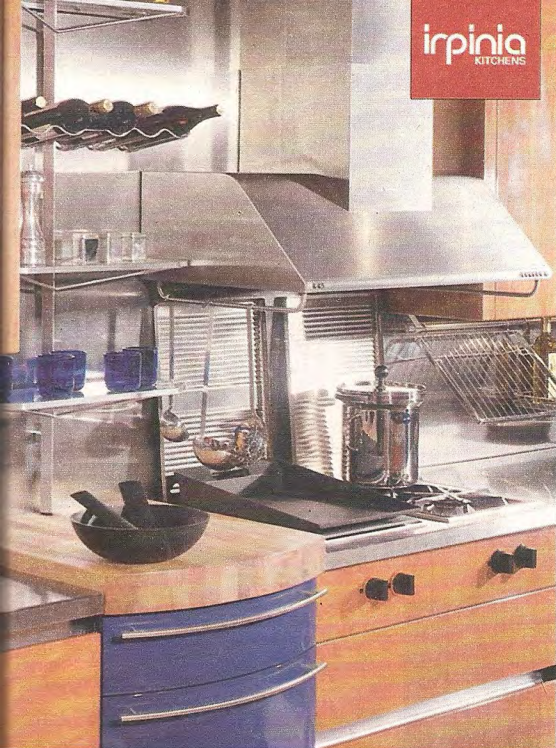
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let you keep your sometimes-used toaster handy. Not only does clearing the counters recoup actual space for food preparation; a clutter-free room looks bigger.

But do keep those things you use a lot out in the open. Chef Jody Adams of Rialto, in Cambridge, says that at home, she wants everything handy, though not necessarily on the counters. "I like having everything hanging," she says. "It's all accessible, like in a restaurant kitchen." She made her home kitchen function like a professional one by installing ceiling and wall racks for pots and utensils.

Next, figure out where you and your family walk most frequently. From refrigerator to microwave? From snack cupboard to table? What can you rearrange to make the traffic patterns more efficient? You'll shave minutes off your daily routine and avoid that get-out-of-my-way feeling when there's more than one person about, says Peter Feinmann of Feinmann Remodeling Inc., in Arlington.

"Pay attention to how you function in the kitchen at the busiest times," he says. "Think about the little things you do."

If you have children for whom the trip from the fridge to the table is full of spills, move the table closer, if you can. Is unloading the dishwasher a cardiovascular workout? Rearrange your cabinets so that dishes and glassware are shelved closer to the dishwasher.

Next, divide and conquer. Kitchen cabinets tend to be tall and deep, sometimes hiding needed items, and kitchen drawers can become jumbled catchalls. Sarah Buckwalter of Organizing Boston, in Watertown, recommends divvying up big spaces into smaller, more usable ones. Products like the Easton cabinet stacker, available at Hold Everything (\$19 each or \$34 for a set of two), in Boston, carve dish-specific spaces out of cavernous cabinets. Undershelf baskets such as those available at The Container Store, in Chestnut Hill and Natick (\$5 to \$7), keep items — whether dishcloths or soup mugs — separate and accessible. Rubbermaid is among a number of manufacturers offering drawer dividers, spice stackers, and racks that will save space and allow you to see what you have on hand. Most products are available at hardware stores.

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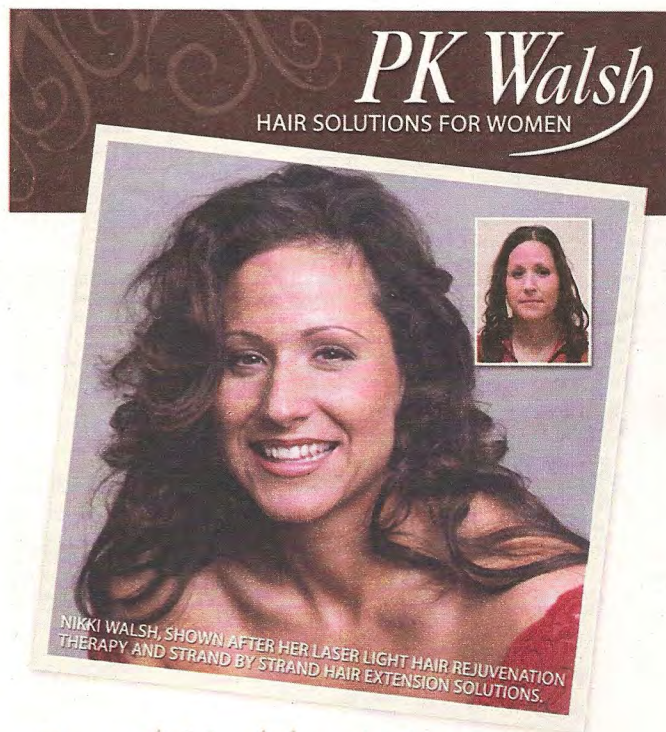
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that's OK, as long as it's organized," Buckwalter says. "Use silverware dividers to keep things like batteries, pens, and papers organized within the drawer." Check out two-tier cutlery dividers to maximize drawer space.

Now look above, between, and under the cabinets for underutilized space. In older homes and condos, high ceilings may provide the square footage that small kitchens seem to lack, but even in kitchenettes, there is often room where you least expect it. Do your cabinets stop before the ceiling? Stack those once-a-year holiday trays on top of the cabinets. Mount a spice rack on the inside of a cabinet door or on the wall in bins with Hold Everything's kitchen racking system (\$9 to \$34). If there's any room beside the undermounted can opener and microwave, install organizers.

Still, the best way to free up space is to get rid of stuff. Buckwalter recommends going through cabinets and pantry twice a year: "If you have canned goods that you haven't eaten in a year or that have expired, throw them out." Ditto for those multiple sets of dishes and glassware, some "from when you were in college or before you got married."

That done, don't fill the void. As professional chef Adams says: "Don't collect too many gadgets. Just learn to use a knife." **BG**

Clea Simon is a freelance writer. She can be reached at cleas@earthlink.net.



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By Clea Simon | June 12, 2005

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