

Spic and Span

Tips for organizing your kitchen and bath

By Kathy Kidwell

Two of the most used rooms in the house, the kitchen and bath, are inevitably prone to clutter and chaos. The pros offer their advice for how to tackle your mess and turn it into a success.

Mind over matter

The main factors in any organization project are time and mentality. "The first step is planning," says Standolyn Robertson, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO). "To allow enough time, estimate how long you think it will take and multiply that by three."

Next, you should set up activity zones for each room. "Set up your kitchen as a triangle, moving from stove to sink to refrigerator," says Ramona Creel, professional organizer and founder of onlineorganizing.com, an online resource for organizing products and services.

In the kitchen

Keep the following tips and expert advice in mind when organizing your kitchen:

- **Jacque Ross, owner of Castaway the Clutter in Ellicott City**, recommends setting up zones in the kitchen, such as food preparation, baking, cleaning, and other categories that apply to your lifestyle. Then, keep the items that coordinate with the function of that zone in those particular cabinets.
- Countertops are prime real estate," says Katherine Trezise, owner of Absolutely Organized in Cockeysville. "Reserve them for small appliances you use at least once a week and perhaps a few decorative items."
- Because the kitchen is used for so many purposes other than cooking and eating, make space for the additional functions the room serves. Cindy Bernstein, owner of Aim 4 Order in Baltimore, suggests setting up a homework station for the kids and a mail center with a designated files for each family member as well as a place for other papers.
- "Alphabetize spices in a rack to make them easier to locate," Creel says. She also recommends you keep small packets, like gravy, JELL-O and dip mixes, together in a basket, and group all of your foods together in categories for easy access.



Investing in containters, baskets and other organizational products is a key step in keeping your kitchen and bath organized. *Photo courtesy of The Container Store*

In the bath

Robertson offers the following tips for organizing your bath:

- Use college dorm-style totes to store small items.
- Make kits to store in the linen closet for the following: first aid, spa, manicure, hair coloring, cold and flu tote (tissue, lozenges, cough syrup).
- Regularly check for empty, outdated and worn items that you can discard.

Ross also recommends setting up an area for the children's bath toys, including a designated spot where you can stack them to dry.

Products and paraphernalia

Investing in containers, baskets and other organizational products is a key step in keeping your kitchen and bath organized. "Hold off buying permanent storage containers until you've completed the cleaning step," Robertson says. "Then, you can choose containers to store the things you are going to keep."

The following items are at the top of Creel and Robertson's lists of products to buy for organizing your kitchen and bath:

- Containers. "It can be a bin or a basket -- any unit that will contain a category of a particular item, like make-up or sponges," Robertson says.
- Racks and pull-out storage. These make use of any "dead space" in a cabinet, according to Creel, and they make it easy to access your stored items.
- Drawer dividers. These keep utensils, small bath items and much more separated and easy to find.
- Label maker. According to Trezise, one of the best organizing tools is an electronic label maker, which can be used to label shelves, containers, folders, etc.

If the process of organizing seems overwhelming, break the overall job down into more manageable undertakings, Bernstein says. "Spend 15 minutes a day decluttering to get started -- you can even set a timer. If you use this approach, within a month, the entire project could be done."

If you realize the importance of having an organized kitchen and bath, but don't feel you can tackle the organization project on your own, there are hundreds of professionals available to help you. To find a professional organizer near you, visit NAPO's Web site, www.napo.net.

Editorial Resources

Absolutely Organized, (410) 329-3300, www.absolutely-organized.com. Aim 4 Order, (410) 484-8328, www.aim4order.com. **Castaway the Clutter**, (410) 615-0320, www.castawaytheclutter.com. The Container Store, (888) 266-8246, www.containerstore.com. National Association of Professional Organizers, 4700 W. Lake Ave., Glenview, IL 60025, (847) 375-4746, www.napo.net. www.OnlineOrganizing.com, P.O. Box 1942, Clinton, MD 20735, www.onlineorganizing.com. Shelf Conversions, 10116 Leadbetter Place, Ashland, VA 23005, (888)903-8839, www.glideout.com. Teragren Fine Bamboo Flooring, Panels & Veneer, 12715 Miller Road NE, Ste. 301, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, (206) 842-9477, www.teragren.com. Things In Place Organizing Services, (781) 893-8477, www.thingsinplace.com.