

Remodeling Your Kitchen

A general guide to choosing the right layout.



Step #

1

Consider how you use your kitchen

How many people in your household will use it?

The answer to this question will determine how much use your kitchen gets, and how much traffic there is likely going to be in the kitchen at any one time.

Do two or more cooks typically work at the same time?

If so, you may want extra counter space and/or an additional sink.

Do you entertain frequently - and do you typically have formal or informal gatherings?

If you entertain a lot, you may want to open up the kitchen/living room area into a great room. This lets you be part of the party while you're working.

What other activities commonly occur in the kitchen?

Some houses have a laundry closet in the kitchen. Other people want a wet bar, a breakfast bar or even a desk for writing or a computer.

Do you have any special needs?

Is a user exceptionally short or tall, and uncomfortable working at standard-height counters for long periods of time? Do you have a disabled or elderly household member who may have special needs?

This, obviously, is not a complete list, but just a starting point.

Before you begin designing, think about who uses the kitchen and how they use it.

Step #

2

Think about the features you want

For Example...

- Do you need an island (and have room for it), a peninsula, or a breakfast nook?
- Would you fill a pantry?
- Would you rather have a stainless steel or enameled cast iron sink?
- Do you use a microwave for major cooking or just heating up cups of tea?
- Do you prefer cooking with gas or electricity?
- Do you want a combination oven-and-range or a cooktop with a wall oven?
- Do you use enough small appliances that you could use an appliance garage to store them?

The fewer structural and mechanical changes you make, the less you'll spend. But that doesn't mean that all those changes cost a lot of money. You'll need the advice of licensed professionals to make final decisions, but you can at least get a rough idea of how much extra major changes would cost by answering the following questions:

Is the wall you want to move a load-bearing wall?

Load-bearing walls support the structure of the house, and moving them is a complex job for a professional. Typically, an interior load-bearing wall runs the length of the house, at about the center of the structure.

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What rooms are directly above and below the kitchen?

If the rooms above and below are finished, it'll be a lot more difficult to reroute plumbing pipes, heating ducts and electrical wires.

Does your new design require that you move existing doors and/or windows?

If so, this makes the job more difficult, because exterior walls are always load-bearing.

Step # 3

Think about style (the fun part!)

Chances are, you've seen kitchens that you like, in magazines, friends' homes, etc. The first question to ask is whether the style you like best will fit with your home. You may have loved European cabinets in the magazine, but they might not look as good in your Queen Anne Victorian style home.

Also, consider what kind of color changes you'd like to make - and whether your ideal colors would necessitate buying new appliances. When you choose colors, think of them in relation to surrounding rooms and try to find colors that complement the rest of the house.

Finally, consider your budget and any other remodeling that you might want to do. Sometimes, related projects are easier and cheaper when done at the same time as the kitchen

Step # 4

Most kitchens are designed around four work centers

The Cleanup Center around the sink should have at least 18" to 30" on one side, and 48" to 54" on the other. This allows enough room to stack dishes, pans and utensils. Always plan for at least 12" between the sink and the nearest corner, measured from the front of the counter.

The Cooking Center around the range requires 12" minimum on one side of the range, and 15" to 24" on the other side, again with 12" minimum to the nearest corner. Microwaves and built-in ovens should have at least 15" to 18" counter space on the right side (assuming the door is hinged on the left side).

The Storage Center around the refrigerator needs 15" to 18" on the handle side of the refrigerator, to set food.

The Mixing/Prep Center should be handy to pans, bowls and utensils, and should consist of at least 42" to 84" of free counter space.

If space permits, some designers also include a serving center - another 36" to 84" of free counter space to set bowls and pans.

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As you design, you'll also want to plan for the following minimum clearances so you'll have enough room to work comfortably:

- There should be at least a 42" clearance from the front edge of the counter top to the nearest table or island.
- Leave at least 20" from the front edge of the dishwasher door (when open) to the nearest obstruction, so you'll have room to load and unload.
- Plan for at least 26" between the kitchen work area and the nearest traffic path.
- Allow 36" between the nearest obstruction and an eating table, so there is room to pull a chair away from the table.

Step # 5

Kitchen layouts are based on a concept called the work triangle.

The work triangle consists of imaginary lines that connect the refrigerator, the range and the sink. For maximum comfort and efficiency, the three legs of the work triangle should total between 23 and 26 feet.

There are four basic kitchen layouts: the one-wall or galley, the corridor, the L-shaped and the U-shaped. There are, of course, a nearly infinite variety of layouts, but most are based on these four.

Step # 6

Cabinets can also be divided into basic types.

Assuming that you're considering modular (pre-manufactured) cabinets rather than custom, the widths will run in 3" increments from 9" up through 36". The standard height of a base cabinet is 34 1/2", and the standard depth is 24".

Wall cabinets are 12" deep (except for specialty cabinets designed to be installed over the refrigerator), and come in the same 3" increments. Standard heights are 12", 15", 18", 30", and 36". Wall cabinets are installed so the bottom of the cabinet is 54" above the floor (about 18" above the countertop). The height you select should depend on your ceiling height and how tall you are - there's no point in buying tall cabinets that reach to the ceiling if you can't get up to get items in and out of the top shelves.

There are four basic types of base cabinets:

- A standard base has one drawer, with a door and shelves below.
- A drawer base has three or four stacked drawers.
- A sink base is open below, with a door below a single false drawer front. In some brands, the drawer front tilts out to provide storage for sponges and cleaning supplies.
- A corner base fits in a corner. It may have a lazy susan inside or shelves.

Naturally, there are a wide range of variations on these four basic styles.