

10 ways to cut the clutter on your kitchen counter

Make sure that small appliance deserves the space you give it

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Photo: Mark Lund Photography

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With the heaviest cooking season upon us, it's time to reclaim your counters so you'll have room to prepare those holiday feasts. "The smaller the room, the more important areas of open space are," says Janine Adams, a certified professional organizer (CPO) with Peace of Mind Organizing in St. Louis, Mo. For starters, don't store things that you rarely use on your counter. To help you clear the decks, here are more tips from Adams and other organizing experts.

Be realistic. "Given an open, horizontal space, most people will fill it up," says Julie Bestry, CPO, of Chattanooga, Tenn. She suggests taking an honest look at your lifestyle. "Ask yourself, 'When was the last time I actually made fondue or paella?'" Then think about your family's habits, and use your kitchen's prime real estate for the tools you use most often."

Designate counters. Consider them "for essentials only." Small appliances should earn their place on the counter, Adams says. Look for multi-functional models. For example, the \$60 Ninja Master Prep Professional QB1004, which topped Consumer Reports' blender Ratings, is also a chopper with interchangeable blades, and has containers to make it easy to switch functions.

Group like with like. "You'll reduce the number of steps you take to complete a task," Bestry says. "For example, put all your coffee-making supplies, and perhaps even the to-go cups, in one cabinet, right above your coffeemaker and next to the sink, so you aren't filling the carafe with water on one side of the kitchen and then crossing the kitchen to pour it into the coffeemaker on the other."

Repurpose containers. All the shelves in the world won't help you if small items are still hard to find. Here's a chance to reclaim all those plastic food-storage bins that have somehow lost their lids. "Use them to vertically 'file' packets and pouches for salad-dressing mixes, gravies, and spice packets," Bestry suggests.

Avoid paper pileups. Adams likes having a devoted area for papers—say, a kitchen desk or basket outside the kitchen door—to reduce stacks on the counters. Bestry looks instead to technology to eliminate paper clutter. She suggests using websites like Evernote.com and Dropbox.com to keep electronic notes and files instead of paper ones. Bonus: It's better for the environment.

Spice it up. Storage devices for spices, such as back-of-cabinet-door racks, narrow pullout spice cabinets, and inserts for drawers, abound. But here's a case where you may want to trade efficient storage for user-friendliness. "Most chefs I've worked with keep their main spices right on the counter," says Helene Segura, a CPO with LivingOrder in San Antonio. "That gives them easy access to what they need most when they're cooking."

Keep a stool handy. Those to-the-ceiling cabinets are useless if you can't reach them. "And if you have to



leave the room to find a stool, you'll never put that stuff back on the high shelves," Segura says.

Resist bulk shopping. Sure, the bargains can be unbeatable, but do you really need a year's worth of garbage bags? If the answer is a resounding yes, try to store larger items, such as bulk packages of paper towels and large bags of rice, someplace outside the kitchen.

Remember: Less is more. "Plastic food-storage containers are one of the biggest clutter monsters," Segura says. "Limiting your collection to only two or three sizes makes it much easier to keep containers neatly nestled."

Label it. Along with two-tiered turntables for cabinet interiors and dividers for drawers, Adams includes labels on her list of must-have kitchen organizing items. Neat and new: adhesive chalkboard-finish and dry-erase labels, ideal for containers with contents that change from time to time, like bins for breakfast cereals.

—Adapted from *Consumer Reports' Kitchen Planning & Buying Guide*



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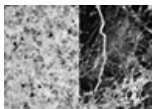
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