



# CATCH-ALL Kitchen

By prioritizing your needs and thinking creatively, you can design a multipurpose kitchen that brings your family together.

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Kitchens are among the most vital parts of our homes. No longer just for cooking, today's kitchens act as socialization hubs, home offices, craft rooms, bill-pay centers and more. In fact, despite a decline in home size (by 2015, average new home size is expected to be 2,150 square feet, down from a peak of 2,500 in 2007), the size of the average kitchen is actually increasing as Americans choose to allocate more and more floor space to kitchens that do double-, triple-, even quadruple-duty.

If you want your kitchen to serve you better, start by thinking about what activities you want to accommodate: Do you need a work space? A garden-supply table? A dedicated baking area? By defining the activities you want to engage in most and planning accordingly, you are sure to design a kitchen that works for you.

## IS IT A COOKING ROOM, AN EATING ROOM OR A HOMEWORK ROOM?

Today's kitchen has truly become the proverbial "heart of the home" as the line between the kitchen and adjoining living areas blurs—in new construction, open floor plans that incorporate meal preparation, eating and work space, and an entertainment area have become the norm. Achieving a multifunctional kitchen by creating a more open floor plan is also the top priority in many remodels. The benefits of this approach are multifold and include reduced material use, better space utilization and daylighting, as well as a more accessible space that can be adapted to a wide variety of occupants.

Open floor plans keep cooks in contact with the rest of the house and accommodate chatting or entertaining during meal preparation.



### IN THE ZONE

From the 1930s to the 1990s, the average American kitchen was designed based on the “triangle theory,” wherein the sink, range and refrigerator were placed in an efficient triangle in a 10-by-10-foot room. These kitchens did not safely allow for two cooks in the kitchen, had no space for eating and were essentially closed off from the rest of house, minimizing occupant communication. As the size of the average kitchen began to grow, the triangle became less efficient, giving rise to the “zone approach” to kitchen design. Kitchens designed in zones cater to the needs of their occupants. For example, all kitchens should have a prep zone, a cook zone and a clean-up zone, but you can further tailor your kitchen to your lifestyle with spaces dedicated to specific activities such as a bread-baking zone, a canning zone or a garden prep area. The lines between the zones are loose and typically overlap.

### EATING/SOCIALIZING/HOMEWORK ZONE:

Most kitchens act as a socialization hub. Guests might enjoy appetizers and a glass of wine while their host finishes the main course. A wife might pay bills and chat while her husband cooks breakfast. The kids might work on school projects or fun crafts while mom makes dinner. A few design tricks can accommodate socializing, creating cozy spots for hanging out that don’t interfere with food preparation.

Bar-top seating on the back of a peninsula or a kitchen island allows people outside the kitchen work area to talk with the cook. A 24-inch barstool with a 12- to 15-inch countertop overhang will provide adequate knee room and allow both seniors and young children a safe perch. Or, for a work or hangout space that’s within view of the kitchen, consider a countertop that extends from the kitchen into the living space through a cut-out in the wall. The kitchen side can be used for prep work, while the living-room side is perfect for work and homework. Put shelves under the counter on the living room side to store office or craft supplies or toys. Make the bar top the same level as the kitchen counter to double usable counter space. The counter can also easily act as a buffet area when you’re entertaining, or as a school project area when the kids’ classmates are over.

Alternatively, you could install a built-in dining nook. These space-efficient seating areas are great for reading cookbooks and helping with homework, as well as eating. If you want your dining space to do double-duty as a work or school project space, incorporate helpful accessories: A wall-mounted cabinet can conceal work supplies during dinner; a dining table with drawers can provide a spot to stash pens and notebooks. Typical seat height is 18 inches with a 30-inch table height—don’t forget to use the bench for concealed storage!

Lastly, incorporate high-quality, efficient, dimmable lighting that allows you to comfortably read the daily paper on a dark winter morning and also enjoy romantic mood lighting when entertaining. Complement ambient lights with brighter task lighting on specific work areas.

Kitchen islands with lots of storage space are great multipurpose items, providing extra countertop space or a spot for guests to sit and relax, as well as a place to stash tools, cookbooks or other supplies.

RIGHT: Open shelving serves double-duty as both storage and décor, freeing up cabinet space for less attractive items such as pots and pans. Seeing through to the back wall also visually expands the room’s space.



### Shelf Life

If you don’t have enough cabinet and drawer space, here are a few tricks that can help you reclaim your space. (See “Resources” on page 63 for sources for the items mentioned here.)

**OPEN SHELVING:** Mount open shelving and stack your most attractive dishes there.

**HANGING POT RACK:** A hanging pot rack gets a whole slew of clutter out of your limited storage space.

**STACKABLES:** Sure, you stack your plates, but other kitchen must-haves are also designed for stacking these days. Look for stackable glasses, storage containers, pots and pans to pack more stuff in less space.

**HANGING GLASS RACK:** Glass racks designed to hold mugs, wine or juice glasses can give you back cabinet space.

**PEGBOARD PANS:** If you’ve got a section of unused wall space, think about installing a pegboard. Use large hooks to hang pots and pans. Paint the pegboard one color, then outline the pots and pans you plan to hang on it and paint those areas a different color. You’ll always know where each thing goes!

**OVER-CABINET STORAGE:** If you’re installing new cabinets, set them a bit lower than the ceiling to give yourself above-cabinet storage for infrequently used items.

**SILVERWARE STASH:** Free up your silverware drawer by choosing a dining room table with under-table drawers where you can store cutlery. Alternatively, consider a beautiful wood case or other vessel that can be used as both a centerpiece and for silverware storage.



A perfectly sized cart makes a kitchen nook a functional and mobile garden work station.

Studies show that couples who spend time in the kitchen together have stronger relationships, so make it easy to hang out while cooking.

#### DEDICATED WORK ZONE:

A kitchen desk area can help keep a household organized and well-connected. A standard open desk countertop should be set 29 to 31 inches above the floor and be at least 21 inches deep. Include a variety of drawers, open shelf units and/or cabinet storage for your bank book, thumbtacks and files. Consider installing a corkboard above the desk area where the backsplash would normally go. If your kitchen is very low on space, consider a fold-out desk area with hinges that can lay flat against the wall when not in use. Alternatively, if you would prefer to put work away when it's done, consider an armoire-style desk you can close. Lastly, remember to incorporate places for computers and cell phones, as well as easy access to outlets and under-cabinet lighting.

#### GARDEN ZONE:

If you're an avid gardener, you might want to build in a space for that activity within the kitchen. Mounting some shelves below the kitchen window or extending a windowsill can provide a spot for kitchen herbs to grow. Create an herb-drying space by hanging a sturdy piece of twine or wire high along an open piece of wall. If your kitchen has a door near the garden, think about installing shelves or a folding counter space for veggies you've just brought in. Also hang wall-mounted shelves or a small cabinet for garden tools.

#### PREP ZONE FOR A TWO-COOK KITCHEN:

Studies show that couples who spend time in the kitchen together have stronger relationships, so make it easy to hang out while cooking. Define two work areas with centralized storage and tool placement. A central lazy susan and a magnetic knife/utensil strip hung on the wall between two chopping blocks makes it easy to share spices and tools. Consider adding a second sink to minimize congestion at the tap—it can also facilitate good hygiene practices for kids and make entertaining easier.

#### BAKING ZONE:

Start your baking zone with a 30- to 33-inch-high countertop—the perfect ergonomic height for kneading bread dough and rolling pie crusts. These lower-than-average counters also allow children or wheelchair-bound household members to help with baking. Position the baking zone near the oven to reduce congestion. If you have the space and resources, you can install a combination microwave-convection oven under the counter or in a wall cabinet as a second oven for your baking zone. Lastly, consider dedicating counter space or incorporating a mixer lift in the bake zone for a stand mixer to minimize the need to move and store this heavy item.

## Creating Your Own Multifunctional Kitchen

■ **LIKE MOST THINGS IN LIFE, A MULTIFUNCTIONAL KITCHEN WILL WORK BEST IF YOU ESTABLISH SOME GOALS.** Do you need more space for cooking? Trying to find a spot for paying the monthly bills? Need a kids' play area within sight of the stove? Once your goals are set, create a plan for executing those goals. It could be as simple as adding a few cabinets or storage shelves on the wall, or as complex as tearing out an entire wall. Discuss the goals and plan with all the parties involved in transforming your kitchen (family members, professional organizers, designers, contractors).

■ **NEXT, PURGE YOUR KITCHEN OF UNUSED ITEMS,** take inventory of what is left, then streamline your drawer and cabinet storage with easy-to-install organizers from the local hardware store to create the zones that best fit your needs (reused vessels also make great organizers). Space allowing, free-standing furniture can provide additional zoning options, such as an armoire desk for a dedicated office area or a mobile kitchen cart that can act as a second prep area or an outdoor kitchen aid.

■ **IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING BUILDING OR REMODELING,** know your limits. If you're planning something complex, hire an expert. You save time and money by designing and building well the first time. Go to the National Kitchen & Bath Association ([nkba.org](http://nkba.org)) to find certified kitchen designers in your area. Go to your local chapter of the National Association of Home Builders ([nahb.org](http://nahb.org)) or the local chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry ([nari.org](http://nari.org)) to find certified, licensed and bonded general contractors.

■ **LAST, BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST,** whether reorganizing or remodeling, think about your renovation's environmental impact. Select products and materials that are made from renewable resources, don't contain high levels of chemicals, are resource-, energy- and water-efficient, and sport third-party certifications from trustworthy organizations such as Greenguard, Energy Star and WaterSense. Donate gently used items such as cookware and dishes to a local women's shelter or secondhand store. With planning, you can likely reuse existing components such as cabinets in your remodel, or repurpose them as garage storage. Donate used building supplies to a Habitat for Humanity ReStore ([habitat.org/restore](http://habitat.org/restore)), and get a tax deduction to boot. Lastly, select design-build professionals who have experience and share your vision for a sustainable home.



You can make your own creative hanging storage with something as simple as a section of mounted wood trellis.

#### RESOURCES

##### Kitchen carts

**Catskill Craftsmen**  
[catskillcraftsmen.com](http://catskillcraftsmen.com)  
sustainable wood kitchen carts

##### John Boos

[johnboos.com](http://johnboos.com)  
FSC-certified kitchen carts and worktables

##### Vienna Woodworks

[viennawoodworks.com](http://viennawoodworks.com)  
reclaimed barn wood kitchen islands

##### Stackables

**Natural Home Products**  
[Target.com](http://Target.com)  
Eazistore recycled-content stacking pots and pans

##### Preserve

[preserveproducts.com](http://preserveproducts.com)  
recycled, stackable drinking glasses

##### Shelves/Cabinets

**California Closets**  
[californiaclosets.com](http://californiaclosets.com)  
custom organization products and shelving

##### MOBOS

[ilovemobos.com](http://ilovemobos.com)  
recycled metal shelves and cabinets

##### Glass racks

**Green Bride Guide**  
[greenbrideguide.com](http://greenbrideguide.com)  
FSC-certified Mission Style Wine Glass Rack

##### Wine Enthusiast Catalog

[wineenthusiast.com](http://wineenthusiast.com)  
reclaimed wine barrel hanging glass rack

##### Pot racks

**TreeMade**  
[etsy.com/shop/treemade](http://etsy.com/shop/treemade)  
tree limb hanging pot rack

##### woodbirddesign

[etsy.com/shop/woodbirddesign](http://etsy.com/shop/woodbirddesign)  
antique window hanging pot rack

##### Organizers

**Container Store**  
[containerstore.com](http://containerstore.com)  
eco-friendly bin and shelving options

##### Stacks and Stacks

[stacksandstacks.com](http://stacksandstacks.com)  
bamboo drawer trays, organizers and shelves

##### Way Basics

[waybasics.com](http://waybasics.com)  
paperboard storage shelves and cubes