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Making kitchen cabinets more user-friendly

By STACY DOWNS
The Kansas City Star

It's easy to get kitchen cabinet envy when you see the latest models with their shiny car-lacquer exteriors and hidden hinges. It's no wonder painting cabinets or replacing the fronts is all the rage.

But it's what's behind the doors that matters most. This is where we store food, cookware, utensils and more. If you really want to get jealous, open drawers and doors of new cabinets with their fancy-pants slide-out pantries and dish racks.

"The problem with older cabinets is that they look like black holes inside," says Krista Williamson, owner of K2 Workshops in Overland Park, which offers home-improvement classes. "No one wants to crawl through a dungeon."

However, simple modifications, such as adding sliding shelves and rolling pullout drawers, can give existing cabinets new life, Williamson says. Upgrading what you have can save thousands of dollars versus replacement. She demonstrates the theory on a decades-old cabinet from Habitat ReStore, a nonprofit that sells previously owned building materials.

"This base cabinet had an upper shelf that just came out halfway," she says. "It was for storing small appliances like a mixer and a blender. But the cabinet was kind of useless, because you still had to get down on your hands and knees. And a fourth of the storage space wasn't being used."

So Williamson removed the worthless shelf. She measured the width and depth of the cabinet interior and had a new shelf and reinforcements made with 3/4-inch plywood cut at a home-improvement warehouse, securing it with silicone. She found Rev-a-Shelf wooden and metal pullouts from Lowe's that would fit inside.

"It's important to have the right measurements," she says. The pullouts should be a half-inch less wide than your doors on either side. Sometimes they have to be special ordered. "Someone was returning some of the systems because they weren't the right fit."

In less than an hour, Williamson installed glides and turned the cabinet into a more useful one with pullouts that can be used for stacks of dishes or pots and pans. She prefers wooden drawers ("they're more furniture like"), but metal ones can be more economical and space-efficient.

"Just be sure to get the sturdier metal ones," Williamson cautions. "They're not all created equally."



DAVID EULITT | The Kansas City Star

Krista Williamson, owner of K2 Workshops offering home-improvement classes for DIYers, gives tips for retrofitting older cabinets with new drawers and pullouts.



Flash graphic | [Installing pullouts for kitchen cabinets](#)

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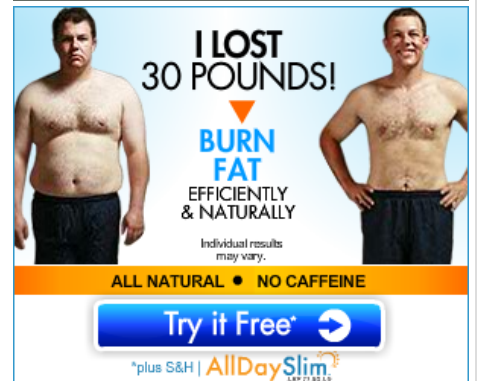
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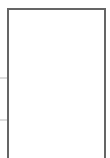
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Before investing in any products, take the time to clean and organize your kitchen cabinets. Kristi Pelzel, owner of the Organization People, categorizes everything into zones: spices, linens, foil/wrap. Consider it an opportunity to pare down.

"People usually have way too many glasses," Pelzel says. "Donate the ones you don't use. They shouldn't be crammed inside. Leave breathing-room space between them."

The same goes for leftover containers (limit two per person). And Pelzel suggests storing occasional pieces elsewhere, especially in a space-crunched kitchen.

"Put the turkey platter and the silver you use once a year in a box marked 'Thanksgiving,' " Pelzel says. "They don't need to take up precious real estate in the kitchen."

Pelzel advocates using what you have for storage before buying more stuff. She likes using clear baggies because they're space-efficient, and you can easily see what's inside. They're good for storing coupons, for example.

Kitchen cabinet organization systems have become a popular category. Materials include white polymer, brushed aluminum wire with chrome plating, birch and maple hardwoods, bamboo and rattan basket drawers. One of the most recent additions to kitchen organizational materials is clear glass for a more modern look, but it comes with a higher price tag.

One of the main things people struggle with is spice storage, says Geri Higgins, owner of Portfolio Kitchen & Home, a kitchen showroom in Kansas City. There are door-mount systems and drawer inserts, which can be good as long as they're not placed above the cooktop, where the humidity will shorten the spice life.

Higgins separates the spices by sweet and savory and then arranges them alphabetically. A little Martha? Perhaps, but she has a lot of spices. She wishes she could go even further in organizing them.

"They need an app for spice expiration by bar code," Higgins says. "They have wine-storage apps and new technology for expired food in the refrigerator, so why not for spices, too?"

Food storage

Wicker baskets with washable polymer liners can contain vegetables such as potatoes and onions (\$69.99, Peak at Home).

Caddies

A cleaning caddy is attached to under-sink cabinets but can detach for scrubbing elsewhere in the kitchen and the house (\$63.05, Peak at Home). There is also a plate caddy by Blum (\$150 for a set of two, Portfolio Kitchen & Home), a handled carrier in the drawer that allows you to transport a whole stack of dishes to the table in one trip.

High-to-reach

Hydraulic systems bring items from barely accessible places — such as above the stove — within reach. The downside: They don't stay down, so it takes both hands to grab an item (\$237.30, Peak at Home).

Dividers

Baking sheets, cutting boards, foil and wrap can stay tidy with tray dividers (\$15.23, Peak at Home).

Peg systems

Organizers with removable pegs allow you to fit several sizes of plates in one drawer. (System starts at \$47.44, Peak at Home; glass plates, Pryde's Old Westport)

Call in your own reinforcements

Unfortunately, many cabinet boxes are made of particle board, which doesn't provide good support for securing new wood or wire organization systems. Krista Williamson, owner of K2 Workshops in Overland Park, offers home-improvement classes for do-it-yourselfers of all skill levels. On April 16, she's teaching a class on renewing kitchen cabinets through paint and new doors.

home. She constructs a new shelf and side reinforcements from 3/4 -inch plywood.

Level: Easy

Time: Less than an hour after plywood is cut at a home-improvement warehouse.

Resources

- Blum: www.blum.com
- Container Store: www.containerstore.com



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- Hafele: www.hafele.com
- K2 Workshops: 7393 W. 97th St., Overland Park, 913-439-1581, www.k2workshops.org
- Peak at Home: 47 Central Ave., Kansas City, Kan., 913-232-9169, www.peakhomeproducts.com
- Portfolio Kitchen & Home: 8027 State Line Road, 816-363-5300, www.portfolio-home.com
- Rev-a-Shelf: www.rev-a-shelf.com
- Simple Human: www.simplehuman.com

Insider tips

Measure. Be sure to write down the height, width and depth of the inside of your cabinet before buying anything. For example, a typical 18-inch-wide cabinet is only 15 1/2 inches wide inside.

Shop around. Local stores often carry supplies that are less expensive than what's found online, and you can avoid shipping costs.

Think ahead. Kitchen-cabinet organization products take a week or more to arrive.

To reach Stacy Downs, call 816-234-4780 or send e-mail to sdowns@kcstar.com.

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