

Kitchen Organization for the New Year

Local organizers, designers and culinary experts offer smart tips for making space and clearing clutter.

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This kitchen by Case Design/Remodeling, Inc. was built with open shelving that offers extra storage as well as easy access to dinnerware. Photo courtesy of Case Design/Remodeling, Inc.

By Marilyn Campbell

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If organizing an unruly kitchen, one where there never seems to be enough space for storage containers and pots and pans, is on your list of resolutions this year, the project might be less daunting than you think. From creating a system for grouping spices to keeping plates in easy reach, local experts share secrets for a well-maintained kitchen.

Hang pots and pans inside pantry doors, says Sallie Kjos of GreyHunt Interiors in Chantilly. "It organizes them, but decoratively can look effective."

Pots and pans can also be hung from the ceiling using a hanging cookware rack. "These are actually very pretty hanging over a kitchen island and it frees up cabinet space for other items when storage space is limited," said Susan Unger, of ClutterSOS in Vienna.

Victoria Sanchez, of Victoria at Home in Alexandria, agrees: "Pot racks are totally underutilized," she said. "They offer extra storage for your pots and pans and add a decorative element above an island or along the wall."

Unger also recommends storage racks that hang from walls and doors. "[They are] very functional and I've used them many times in kitchens and other rooms," she said. "It is not unattractive, but [it's] not a 'pretty' organizing item."

Reduce clutter any way you can. "Clear off the fridge," said Kjos. "Paint the inside of your cabinets with magnetic chalk paint and write your messages there with your calendar and coupons hidden away for a cleaner look."

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When it comes to storing cooking utensils that need to stay within easy reach, Kjos said, "You can replace canisters that may look bulky with glass jars. Use urns to store your wooden spoons and spatulas to make them into a pretty and decorative arrangement."

Anna Reeves, owner of Tiny Chefs with locations in Potomac, Alexandria, Fairfax, Arlington, Vienna and Oakton, gets back to basics when it comes to cooking and kitchen organization. She starts with an old-fashioned pad and pencil, organizational tools that would be helpful in most kitchens.

"One good tip is to write down everything you need before you sit down to make a recipe, so you have a list of all the supplies and ingredients" she said. "I have friends who start a recipe and then realize that they don't have all of the ingredients and tools they need."

Even something as simple as stacking storage containers becomes easier when they are similar in size. "Uniform Tupperware containers make for easy storage," said Reeves.

Kristen Robinson, a chef instructor at The Art Institute of Washington, a branch of The Art Institute of Atlanta, has an organizational safety warning, however.

"Most people don't realize that food poisoning usually occurs in the home due to improper food storage and handling," she said. "I label and date everything that goes in the refrigerator and freezer. It's important to label and date leftovers and pay close attention to expiration dates. One thing I do to keep items fresh on the shelf is to store my grains, beans and rice in mason jars. I label and date these items, too. I hate having open bags of these items and Ziploc bags can be clumsy."

IF YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH to have a kitchen remodel on your agenda for 2014, consider cutting-edge cabinetry that offers storage solutions. "I am both pleased and amazed at the new designs for base corner cabinets," said Joe Starkey of Old Town Bath and Kitchen in Alexandria. You can still find and still use traditional lazy Susans, but alternatives out there, [such as a] blind corner with full access or with swing out or with pull out, are staggering. Newer mechanics have allowed redesign of the actual storage areas."

Bill Millholland, executive vice president at Case Design/Remodeling, with offices in Bethesda and Falls Church said, "One particular project always comes to mind when I think of kitchen organization and clever storage solutions, and it incorporates the idea of placing heavy items [like] plates in a drawer rather than up high in a wall cabinet. This is both convenient and practical for people of all ages and abilities."

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