

Design Tips for Small Kitchens

Courtesy Plain & Fancy Custom Cabinetry



White cabinets keep a small kitchen light and fresh.

A small kitchen doesn't have to mean bumping into other family members while you cook dinner or cramming utensils into overstuffed drawers. With careful space planning and a creative approach to storage, you can transform that small and cluttered kitchen into a model of efficiency, organization—and even style.

The National Kitchen and Bath Association defines a small kitchen as one that's 150 square feet or less. Of course, even a kitchen with greater square footage can feel small if piles of snacks, dishes, and recipes have taken over the countertops or if the design and décor contribute to a closed-in look rather than an open, airy one. To create a more spacious space—at least the illusion of one—the NKBA recommends using unique storage solutions, mixing natural and ambient lighting, choosing appliances wisely, and adding personalized touches.

Storage and Organization

Take advantage of all the new storage options now available. Go all the way to the ceiling with your upper cabinets to gain valuable space for seldom used items and make lower cabinets more accessible with rollout shelves, lazy susans, and tilt-out bins. Add depth to your drawer storage and your cabinet layout with pullout wicker baskets. If you aren't replacing cabinets, get more from your existing ones accessories such as tray dividers; lazy susan partitions and storage containers; and chrome-plated backsplash systems with cookbook holders, spice racks and wire baskets.

Lighting & Light Colors

Good task lighting becomes even more crucial in a small space. Place lights under the cabinets to illuminate the countertops. Bring in more natural light by taking down window treatments, adding skylights in the ceiling, and installing a greenhouse window over the sink.

From a design perspective, lighter colored cabinets, wall paints, countertops, and flooring will have an opening and brightening effect. Expand the sense of space with open shelves, pot racks, and glass-front doors.

Appliance Selection & Location

Thoughtful placement and selection of your appliances can greatly improve traffic flow in a small kitchen. Save counter space by building the microwave into the cabinetry and by installing a range or placing a separate cooktop over an oven. An appliance garage or pantry can keep toasters, can openers, and other small appliances hidden and out of the way when not in use. Choose sleekly styled appliance models to reduce visual distractions and contribute to a streamlined look.

Don't assume that you have to sacrifice the power and design statement of a professional-style range. Viking and Bertazzoni offer 24-inch-wide gas ranges specifically for smaller kitchens, apartments, condos, and vacation homes. Another great new space-saving idea is KitchenAid's Briva, a double sink with one side convertible to a dishwasher. Remove the rack, and you've got a second fully functional sink.

Take Down a Wall

If you're willing to explore changing the floor plan, the best way to expand a small kitchen is to literally open it up to an adjoining room, typically a family or dining room. Consult a professional to see if there is a non-load-bearing wall or two that can be removed, creating the space to add an island or peninsula. Or you could cut a rectangular hole in an adjoining wall, creating extra counter space for convenient serving and conversation.

For more ideas and inspiration, check out these books:

- *Making the Most of Kitchens* by Gilly Love
- *Terence Conran Small Spaces: Inspiring Ideas and Creative Solutions* by Terence Conran
- *Small House, Big Style* by Paula Marshall
- *Compact Living* by Jane Graining
- *Creating the Not So Big House: Insights and Ideas for the New American Home* by Sarah Susanka