

Finding Some More Kitchen Space

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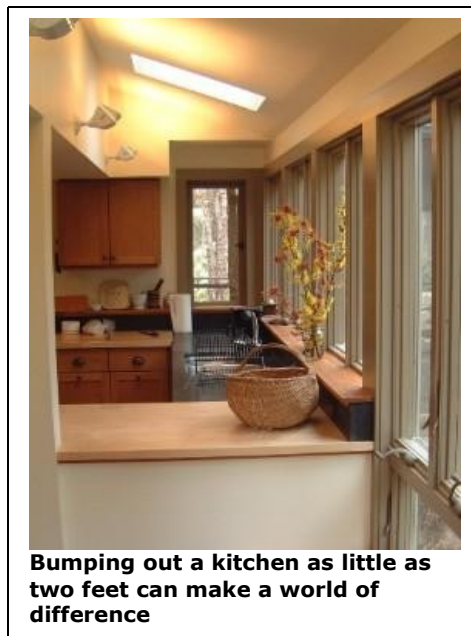
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In many cases, existing kitchens are just too small for any real improvement in space management. Of course, you can add space by building an addition. Although appropriate in some cases, additions can be costly and not always feasible. For that reason, it pays to consider the less expensive alternatives. What you don't spend on structure, after all, you can invest in better cabinets, lights, counters, fixtures, flooring and appliances.

Adding a Bump-Out



Bumping out a kitchen as little as two feet can make a world of difference

One option is to bump out an exterior wall by 24 in. Two feet is the most that a floor can be cantilevered in most localities according to current building codes. It may not sound like much, but it can really make a big difference to a small kitchen.

Not all houses are suitable for this option - for one thing all the floor joists must run the right way. In this scenario, a section of the existing wall is cut out and replaced by a laminated header to support the roof. The old floor is then cantilevered outward and new exterior walls are built along the perimeter of the new floor. The whole extension is covered with a small roof and you have a lot of extra space without paying for a foundation. Assuming a 24in. bump-out, the new space could hold a bank of cabinets and appliances, giving you 2 ft. of wiggle room in front of them.

While it's impossible to fix an exact price, \$3500 to \$5500 might do it, which is one-third the cost of even a modest room addition.

Borrowing from Other Rooms

In other cases, the wall enclosing a small breakfast nook can be removed, extending the length of the kitchen. A breakfast bar over a peninsula cabinet would occupy much less space, and might work even better with today's dine-and-dash eating habits.

However, when it comes to creating open space, nothing can compete with removing a wall between your kitchen and another, little-used room. A formal dining room, adjacent mudroom or enclosed porch are all prime candidates.

While the results of this choice are dramatic, the cost can be pretty reasonable, often as little as a few hundred dollars. But it pays to consider an experienced contractor for this work. Interior walls can be structural, that is, intended to hold up the roof and any upper floors. If removed, these walls have to be replaced with engineered beams. Even non-structural ("partition") walls may conceal plumbing, heating and electrical equipment that must be moved and can easily prove to be a bigger challenge than you want to take on.

Other possibilities include using the space under the stairs adjacent to your kitchen for pantry storage; realigning doorways for better traffic flow and more usable space; and relocating windows that intrude into cabinet space, even replacing windows with skylights.

If there just is not enough floor space for easy movement around the kitchen, one bank of cabinets can be made narrower than normal to increase walking space. If the issue is plenty of floor space, but not enough countertop, countertops can be made deeper than the normal 24" — up to the 30" practical limit. This results in a surprising increase in usable counter space.

Kitchen Addition

When there is just no other place to get more space, the only option may be an addition. Often the more expensive option, sometimes an addition is the only one.

We can build an addition for you, and design the kitchen into it, all at the same time. The nice thing about an addition is that you can build it to fit the kitchen rather than having to design the kitchen to fit the available space. The only restrictions are lot size and set-back requirements, and, of course, your budget.

For more information on designing and building an addition, start with [Planning Your House Addition](#).

Creating an Illusion of Space

If you simply have no way of getting more space, you can manipulate the available space to make it seem larger. Using a light color palette helps the room seem larger. Lighter wood



Knocking down a wall permitted this small dark kitchen to be expanded into the little used formal dining room, providing the addition space for a dedicated baking center and floor to ceiling pantries.



cabinets and pale countertops and floors contribute to the effect.

Manipulating the room's lighting can make it seem much larger. Open up the room to the outdoors and let the sunshine in. Replace small windows with larger ones, even add windows if possible, and eliminate heavy window treatments (use glass block or frosted glass, if necessary, for privacy). Install a skylight. Use [artificial lighting](#) to eliminate shadows and accent lighting to give your kitchen more visual depth without actually making it larger.

Color plays a very important role when it comes to creating the illusion of more space. Light tones will work better for your small kitchen. You can safely compliment these with touches of darker hues, but avoid overdoing it. For wood cabinets, lighter woods and finishes are preferable to darker woods. Maple and birch are the best woods for small kitchens, and reasonably prices. Cherry, alder, and oak in natural finishes also work well. Glass upper cabinet doors make the cabinets seem less bulky, add a decorative element and give you a place to display your fine china and collectibles. Putting small accent lights inside the cabinets also contributes to the illusion of more space.

Sometimes merely cutting an opening in the top half of the wall that separates a kitchen and living or dining room will help. At the very least, it will allow the cook to feel less confined. Anyone who has ever thrown a party knows that cooking can be a spectator sport, so open it up and invite them in.

One excellent way to make a small kitchen seem larger is to eliminate upper cabinets. Your brain subconsciously judged how big a space it by what it can see at eye level. Lower cabinets don't figure into the equation, but upper cabinets appear to the subconscious brain as a wall within a wall, creating the feeling of limited space. You lose a lot of good storage by eliminating upper cabinets, but it can be done. See, [Off the Wall Kitchens: Living Without Upper Cabinets](#) for much more information on the trade-offs involved.

One final way of making a small kitchen seem larger is to reduce the clutter. Small kitchens seem to accumulate stuff sitting on the countertops because there often is not other place to conveniently store it. This clutter breaks up sight lines and contributes to making the room seem smaller. Learn how to store items well might be a big part of the solution to the smallness problem. You may want to invest in fixtures and cabinets that make existing storage more efficient such as rollout shelves, tilt-out bins and lazy susans. Hanging cabinets and cabinets under the counters will help provide you extra storage space where you can hide items away. With careful planning, out of sight storage can be designed to hide all this clutter and keep the lines of the kitchen sleek, straight and uncluttered.