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One Small Change



Don't count on a butter knife or spoon to get the last little bits of food (think: peanut butter and applesauce) out of the container. When you think you've gleaned the last of the tasty goodness from the jar, grab a [spatula](#) (those pictured are silicone with bamboo handles) and give it another go. Surprise! You've stretched that jar of peanut butter one sandwich further.

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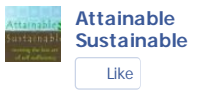
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Home & Garden

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Guest Post: Take Control of Your Kitchen

January 11, 2012
By [Kris Bordessa](#)

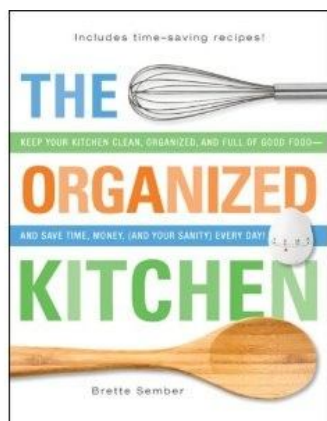


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Who couldn't use a little more organization in their life? Today I have an expert on organization here to share some tips. [Brette Sember](#) is the author of *The Organized Kitchen* published by Adams Media. She writes the popular food blogs *No Pot Cooking* and *Martha And Me*. She is also the author of *The Parchment Paper Cookbook* and the upcoming *The Muffin Tin Cook Book* from Adams Media. Sember is a former attorney and author of more than 35 other books, as well as a member of the International Association of Culinary Professionals. She lives in Buffalo, NY with her husband, two children, and two golden retrievers. You can follow her on Twitter [@brettesember](#).



The kitchen is one of the rooms in the home that produces the highest amount of waste. An organized kitchen allows you to use less and use what you have more responsibly. Learning to improve kitchen efficiency will not only save time and money, but will make you more likely to want to spend time cooking at home and making the most of this important space.

Multiple Uses Creates Multiple Confusion

Your kitchen is probably the most used room in your home, even if you don't cook at home every day. It's the room in the home that has the most traffic and which we ask to do the most. Think about the activities that are happening in your kitchen. Most people use the kitchen as a multi-purpose room and homework, laundry, crafts, bill-paying, and more all take place in this one space. If you can shift some of these activities to other areas of the home, it will free up storage space (keep your scrapbooking supplies in a hall closet and move your household files to a box under your bed, for example) and make the kitchen feel less cluttered and over-used.

Take It One Day at a Time

The thought of completely re-organizing your kitchen is just too daunting. Instead, tackle one drawer, cupboard or shelf a day to make progress. Completely reorganizing your entire kitchen is an overwhelming task, but if you can find 5 minutes a day (while your pasta is cooking, your coffee is dripping, or your broccoli is steaming), you can get a lot done over a week's time.

Make Your Space Work for You

The biggest complaint people have about their kitchens is that there just isn't enough

storage space. No need to build out though! In truth, most people don't maximize the space they have. You likely have wasted or under-used space in your kitchen and if you can turn that into workable space, your kitchen will feel much bigger.

- Keep your eyes open for square storage containers at the thrift store and use them for pantry items like flour, pasta, cereal, rice, beans, etc. Square containers stack and fit together on shelves much easier and actually save space (eliminating those gaps between round containers). Your food will also stay fresh longer and you'll be able to see how much you have left, so you won't overbuy.
- Look up for more storage space. Install shelves over the doorways of the room. Hang a three-tier basket from the ceiling for additional space. Put shelving around your soffits for tons more storage. If you have a separate pantry with a door, install storage above the door on the inside.
- Add metal standing shelves to double your storage area in cupboards. Instead of one level of cans or glasses, you can now fit two.
- Bring in a recycled book case and paint it to match your cabinets and give it the same drawer pulls—it will look like additional built in cabinetry.
- Use the insides of cabinet doors for storage for spices (using wire racks), pot lids (a metal towel rack works well for these), a message board, plastic bags, and more.
- Install roll out drawers inside your lower cabinets. These cabinets often end up messy and underused because no one wants to crawl on their hands and knees and reach back into the dark corners. You'll double your usable space with this trick.
- Banish the junk drawer. This is additional storage space you could be using. Dump everything out and sort it. Put everything away in a newly identified home (pencil cup on the counter for pens, small container in the plastic wrap drawer for twist ties, Velcro a flashlight to the inside of a cabinet drawer, add a magnetized notepad to the fridge, etc.) and gain an entire drawer.

[Click through for more tips and a chance to win a copy of *The Organized Kitchen!*](#)

Cooking Cues

When your kitchen is not easy to use, it can be hard to motivate yourself to cook dinner at home, which we all know saves money and leads to healthier choices. Make cooking a snap with these tips:

- Create meal kits—groupings of all the ingredients you need to make your go-to dishes. This way you can just reach into the pantry and grab everything you need to make tuna noodle casserole or chili. It also makes it much easier to direct someone else in your home to make dinner this way.
- Keep a running list of what's in your freezer. Post this on the door and cross items off when you use them and add them when you buy them. This way you will always know what you have and won't spend your time rummaging and things won't go to waste. Use this technique for your pantry items as well.
- Make a list of the dishes your family enjoys that you make over and over. Buy all the ingredients and always keep them on hand. You will always have something to cook.
- Use the one out, one in rule. If you use up a bag of rice, buy a new one. This way you will always have the same basic items for easy meal prep.
- Prep food before you put it away. Make hamburgers from ground beef, trim meat, wash lettuce and vegetables and divide things like bacon or chicken breasts into serving sizes before freezing.
- Date your leftovers. No sniff test needed to determine if you can use them.

Bring Your Kitchen to Life

Too often when we organize we forget about comfort. The kitchen needs to be a room that is welcoming and warm, so although you are clearing your counters and shelves of clutter, don't forget to keep some touches that express your personality and make the room comfortable. Stencil quotes on the wall, frame children's art or family photos, rotate seasonal decorations, and choose one really gorgeous expensive item that makes you happy (like a big throw rug, pricey vase, or framed print) and expresses your personality.

With a little thought you can make your kitchen a place you love to spend time in.

Want even more ideas for organizing your kitchen? Brette has graciously offered to send one of my readers a copy of *The Organized Kitchen*. To enter, simply leave a comment below, sharing one of your organizational challenges by midnight, January 17, 2012. I'll draw a winner by January 20, 2012. (All dates Hawaii standard time.) Residents of the USA only, please.

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Tags: [Brette Sember](#), [cooking](#), [kitchen](#), [organization](#)**9 Responses to Guest Post: Take Control of Your Kitchen**

1. Darcy on January 11, 2012 at

One of my biggest issues is my cabinets. I swear I organize them all the time, only to find a jumbled mess of wire racks, appliances, and bake ware a week later. I hate how everything tumbles out when I open a cabinet door. Second to that is my pantry. I find it hard to strike a balance between "well-organized" and "well-seen". I can stack and line things up, but invariably something ends up out of sight. And for me, out of sight means out of mind, and I forget I have (for example) Crisco. So I re-buy Crisco. And the cycle continues until I have 5 tins of Crisco, 2 of which are out of date. *sigh*

I love the cooking cues segment of this post. Totally going to implement that tonight.

[Reply](#)

2. Judy Taylor on January 11, 2012 at

I am challenged with disabilities (polio survivor) and being able to stand and cook in the kitchen. So far, because of chronic bursitis in hips and shoulders, upper cupboards and lower cupboards are extremely difficult for me to use. I've brought in a couple of bookcases, open, to hold dishes, glassware, pans, etc. Also one holds extra pantry items. I have a free standing island which I use close to the sink with a stool in between. This allows me to sit and do some cooking, prep work, etc. I could always use more ideas to help make it easier for me to cook in my kitchen. I love to cook, bake, etc. and have a large collection of recipes including those from both grandmothers, my mother, friends, etc.

[Reply](#)

3. joyce avans on January 11, 2012 at

I don't use my dish washer to do dishes. I use it to store my use often items like knives, strainers, funnels, cutting boards, sheet pans, ect. These items used to always fall out of my cupboards. Now they are within a easy reach of my sink and prep counter.

[Reply](#)

4. [Lori CB](#) on January 11, 2012 at

I use the bottom of empty milk containers to keep pouches and bagged mixes organized in my cabinets.

I roll my towels and put my sheet sets in inside out pillowcases
the large plastic zippered bags that sheet and comforters come in i keep for seasonal storage or yarn, material and if they are from curtains i keep them in y suit case for souvenirs and trinkets and other items we collect during our trips and also for craft projects ready to do just plan ahead and put it all in like a ready made kit and the kids can go at it on rainy or snow days.
for all those extra electronic cords put them in TP or paper towel tubes and label the tube and put them in a cerial box on its side in the cupboard or drawer.
hang crown molding down on your wall and use it for shoes with heels or setting out your outfits for the next day or packing.

[Reply](#)

5. Dennis Gentry II on January 11, 2012 at

where to start..... Pots and pans falling out of cabinets,lost items floating through cabinets and draws. Let's not even start on the refrigerator and the disorganization happening among the in and out of date produce and condiments. lets just say this book would be of great use and not just for collecting dust or leveling out that table 😊

[Reply](#)



6. Brandee on January 11, 2012 at

Space is my biggest problem in the kitchen. I know...people say that all the time. But it's especially true for me. My kitchen's footprint is about 16 sq ft. It's a U-shape, with a sink and stove not leaving my counter space. I have to get creative with placement. Cookbooks go on top of the upper cupboards. The shelves in the lower cabinets are not as wide as the cupboards, so in the void I store cutting boards upright (they go back...it's hard to explain). And I dedicate counter areas and corresponding cupboards to specific things. Coffee filters & mugs above the coffee maker; canister of flour & sugar with the mixer, etc.

[Reply](#)



7. Michele Keeley on January 11, 2012 at

I live in a 100+ year old farm house. It started off as a two room house and over time others added to it. My two big problem (aside from electric & plumbing!) are there are only 2 closets and very few cabinets. This fall my in-laws got annoyed over having so little cabinet space in the kitchen (there was only one cabinet with about a 3 ft. counter!) they went to Lowes and bought me some cabinets with a 6 ft counter!!! Not exactly how I imagined remodeling the house but it was a very welcome gift!

[Reply](#)



8. Sheryl on January 11, 2012 at

I never seem to have enough room to store everything – then end up putting things in random places, and forgetting they're there! Great, helpful tips from Brette...thanks

[Reply](#)



9. Julie on January 11, 2012 at

My random utensil drawer. I once heard you should take everything out and put it in a box on the counter. If you use it, then it gets to go back in the drawer. Haven't tried it, but have thought about it.

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Welcome

It's one thing to think, "Hey, I'd love to be more self-sufficient!" and quite another to implement a lifestyle change that might require learning some new skills.

Attainable Sustainable is about bridging the gap between **wanting change** and making it happen without becoming overwhelmed. Nobody's saying you have to go get a tractor and a cow. Attainable Sustainable is about discovering – one step at a time – how to make changes in your life to support a **sustainable lifestyle**.

The Author

Kris Bordessa has been gardening for most of her life. She's been authoring books and writing features for the past ten years or so. It's about time she combined the two, don't you think? [\[More about the author\]](#)



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