REAL SIMPLE

LIFE MADE EASIER

how to

MAKE TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS

this season

53 WAYS TO BE A BETTER GUEST

INSTANT FIXES FOR A MORE EFFICIENT KITCHEN

FINALLY! PANTS THAT REALLY FIT

10 Thanksgiving dinner fails and how to recover

YOUR KITCHEN, ONLY SMARTER

Organizing advice, cooking strategies, refrigerator revelations, and dozens of other pro tips to help your busiest room positively hum with efficiency.

Written by Stephanie Sisco and Virginia Sole-Smith
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Think in zones

STORING ITEMS WHERE YOU USE THEM (BAKING SHEETS BY THE OVEN, GLASSES NEAR THE REFRIGERATOR) SAVES YOU TIME AND QUICKENS CLEANUPS.

What goes where?

If your cooking space turns to chaos every time you scramble eggs, a quick reshuffling is in order. These guidelines will point you in the right direction.

1 COOKTOP, REFRIGERATOR, SINK Typically, the ideal layout centers around a work triangle of these three elements, with four to nine feet between each. But this is not a hard-and-fast rule, especially with today's bigger, more open kitchens. "What's more helpful is to set up distinct areas for frequent activities, like making coffee, prepping dinner, and entertaining," says Mary Kathryn Reese, a kitchen-remodeling pro in Dallas.

2 PREP SPACE Aim for two to four feet of room on either side of the sink and the stove, suggests Reese: "You need at least enough to fit a large cutting board." Have a stand mixer or some other bulky appliance in that spot? Move it. If your kitchen lacks counter space, add more surface area with a rolling island.

3 DISHES, GLASSES, POTS AND PANS Shelves stay neater if you divide cabinets into categories. (Everyday plates in one, most-used cookware in another.) Walk yourself through your usual kitchen routine and consider how many steps you're taking from a cabinet to its corresponding task. If a switch-up will shorten the distance, do it, says Reese.

4 TASK LIGHTING Overhead fixtures aren't illuminating enough. Under-cabinet lighting not only makes food prep easier but also adds ambience. "If you can't have an electrician wire it in, try adhering a battery-operated fixture," says Diane Benbow, a kitchen designer in Asheville, North Carolina. (*RS* pick: Utilitech Under-Cabinet LED Light Bar, $14, lowes.com.)

5 JUNK DRAWER It's a clutter-concealing necessity, but because it's not essential for cooking, it shouldn't take up prime real estate, says Reese. Choose a drawer at the room's perimeter that's 15 to 24 inches wide.

The experts

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