



SIX CURES FOR THE SMALL-KITCHEN BLUES

Expand your kitchen without breaking the bank

Money®

By: Josh Garskof, excerpted: November 2007



Sure, you order takeout three nights a week, and preparing a burger tests the limits of your culinary know-how. But that doesn't mean you don't need and deserve a spacious kitchen. After all, the kitchen has evolved from a room where food is prepared to the hub of a house, where you do everything from eating casual meals to paying the bills and helping Junior with his algebra homework. Plus, as long as you stick within the norms of the neighborhood, a kitchen expansion is one of the best ways to increase your property value, says Omaha appraiser John Bredemeyer, a spokesman for the Appraisal Institute.

"A lot of people buy the kitchen and take the house that comes along with it," he says. "So going from a cooking kitchen to an entertaining kitchen is likely to pay for itself when you sell your house someday."

Best of all, you don't necessarily have to shell out the \$50,000 to \$100,000 cost of a kitchen addition. Here are some money-saving tricks for enlarging the kitchen—or at least making it seem bigger:

RECONFIGURE THE EATING AREA

Having a place to eat in the kitchen is essential, but even a 3½-foot-wide round table takes up a 10-foot-by-10-foot floor space to comfortably accommodate walking around it, says Denver architect Doug Walter. So consider these space-conserving alternatives:

- 1. LOSE THE TABLE.** Replace it with a diner-style booth (\$2,000 to \$5,000), which needs just six feet by eight feet of floor space and can be set directly against the wall or in an alcove. Or, let a new countertop double as a breakfast bar by overhanging it 15 inches off a peninsula or an island. Opt for backless stools that can be tucked almost entirely under the counter.
- 2. USE THE DINING ROOM.** If you rarely eat a meal in the dining room, consider knocking down the wall separating it from the kitchen to form an attached, everyday eating area. That costs about \$1,500 (if you have to move a structural wall, it will cost another \$4,500). You'll lose cabinets, but if you put a peninsula in the wall's place, you'll retain some storage space.

MAXIMIZE THE SPACE

Sometimes kitchen congestion can be resolved by updating an old-fashioned floor plan that's chopping up ample square footage with too many walls and other obstructions.

- 1. ANNEX OTHER SPACES.** Walk-in pantries, mudrooms and laundry rooms that abut the kitchen are often worth sacrificing for an expanded kitchen, says Charlotte, N.C. contractor John Harmon. Construction costs can be as little as \$2,000, depending on the situation. And thanks to stackable laundry machines that can be tucked away in a closet and cabinets that can store as much as an entire closet in a fraction of the space, they won't be missed.
- 2. MOVE THE SLIDERS.** Replacing sliding-glass patio doors with a single swing-out door (\$3,000 to \$4,000) or relocating your backdoor out of prime kitchen territory (\$5,000 to \$7,000) can free up vital wall space for new cabinets and a countertop without adding any floor space.



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Page 2 of 2

ADD ON ECONOMICALLY

If the only solution is more physical space, you may be able to do the job for less than the \$400-a-square-foot (or higher) cost of a full-scale kitchen addition and remodel.

1. ADD ADJACENT LIVING SPACE. If what you really need is an eating area or a space next to your existing kitchen, build a family room, den or great room alongside it. The open floor plan will make the kitchen seem bigger, and the person cooking, (or microwaving, as the case may be), will feel like part of the household activity. And because the new space won't require all the labor and materials involved in reconstructing a kitchen, the project will cost about \$200 a square foot.

2. HANG A "BUMP-OUT." If your plans for the kitchen require just a little more room, you may be able to hang the space off the side of the house by suspending the additional square footage from the existing structure, much like a bay window. As long as the bump-out doesn't extend more than three feet beyond the main exterior wall, it should easily cost \$2,000 less than if the contractor had to excavate the yard and pour a new foundation, says Walter.

Whatever technique you use to expand your kitchen, once it has an open, spacious feel, it's sure to become an even more popular hangout. Heck, it might even inspire you to break out a cookbook.