

Making kitchen living easier

There was a time not all that long ago that American kitchens were designed with one type of consumer in mind: the full-time homemaker with 2.6 children and a breadwinner husband.

Today, manufacturers are recognizing that the typical consumer has gone the way of newsreels and tail fins. One kitchen design simply can't meet everybody's needs. More and more, today's appliances are being designed for and marketed to groups such as disabled or elderly people, whose needs are much different from other consumers.

Nearly 40 million Americans have a permanent disability, the number of Americans 45-64 is expected to increase by one third in the next decade, and more children than ever are helping with housework.

Manufacturers are becoming more sensitive to the needs of people with physical limitations, older people and the very young. Today's products reflect these needs, especially in the kitchen.

Considering the needs of the least-able user is the key to modifying or designing houses, work areas and products that everybody can use. This might range from simple and inexpensive measures such as using a potato masher to turn knobs on a range; removing cabinet doors for easier access or something more extensive, such as building a kitchen around an adaptable "universal design."

A universal design includes wide, barrier-free aisles and smooth floors to allow for wheelchairs and walkers to move easily about. Work surfaces of varying heights accommodate those who are short or tall or who work seated. Good contrast between cabinets and appliances and in graphics on control panels are helpful to those with limited vision.

In the cooking area, built-in products are the most adaptable to special needs. Installing a drop-in range or cooktop at 32 inches — compared to the standard 36-inch counter height

— can be a boon for wheelchair cooks — or at a higher level for a person who can't stoop or bend.

Microwave ovens are especially useful for people with limited physical abilities. They can be installed at any height. The shallow cooking cavity is easy to reach, there's no flame or heating element, and the interior stays cool.

Side-by-side refrigerator/freezers have narrow doors for easier handling. Some models have deep door shelves and bins, baskets and shelves that pull out for easier access and use.

There are many simple in-home modifications that can help physically limited people. For example, elevate appliances with front-opening doors (dishwashers, clothes dryers) to the height needed for a wheelchair user or someone who can't stoop or bend. Lower a built-in oven for wheelchair use or raise it for someone with back problems.

Whirlpool Corp. offers use and care guides and microwave oven cookbooks in Braille, large type or on audio cassettes. Control panel overlays for many kitchen and laundry products are done in Braille that are free to visually impaired owners of Whirlpool appliances. For assistance, call the Whirlpool Appliance Connection line at 1-800-253-1301. For TDD users, the number is 1-800-334-6889.

More information is available in brochures from Whirlpool. "Universal Design" looks into the features of the adaptable kitchen; "Designs for Independent Living" offers advice for modifying, remodeling or designing kitchens and laundry areas; and "Tools for Independent Living" emphasizes the use of everyday tools and products as aids to appliance operation.

Whirlpool says its brochures are based on research and suggestions from disabled people, rehabilitation specialists and appliance experts. For a copy of the set, send a postcard to Whirlpool Corp., Dept. NCW, P.O. Box 5551, Kalamazoo 49003-5551.



Disabled people, rehabilitation specialists and appliance experts contributed to Whirlpool's brochures.

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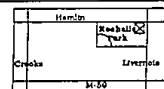
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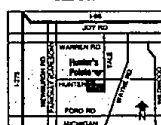
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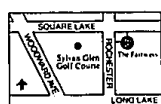
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