

In kitchen

Little things mean a lot

It only stands to reason that, as the hub of the house, the kitchen gets the most use and abuse. Add up the activities that take place in the kitchen to realize that it's no longer just for cooking.

Kitchens are for entertaining, doing homework, preparing income-tax returns — a second family room at best.

Whatever the activity, kitchens can have problems begging for solutions, especially those saddled with awkward counter space, dingy lighting, protruding appliances and a traffic pattern that cuts through the center of a room.

Today, you don't have to rip it all out and do it over if your kitchen lacks charm and function. The homeowner can solve any problem handily with costwise cover-ups and a little ingenuity for a truly winning room.

IT'S TIME to take a new look at your assets, and perhaps try some of these clever kitchen perks:

- Brush up your cabinets with a different-colored paint to transform the look of the room. Knock out ugly cupboard door panels from top cabinets to reveal large serving pieces, or remove doors from bottom cabinets and staple chicken wire over openings to display vegetables in colorful baskets or bins.

- Select an easy-care tile for counter-

top and floor. To keep kitchens looking clean and bright, use softened water to eliminate the sticky soap curd that forms with hard water and leaves a dulling film on glass, tile or acrylic appliances.

For those homeowners on low or no-salt diets, a softener can be plumbed to bypass the cold drinking water, or installed along with a home drinking-water unit.

- To separate food preparation and cooking from family activity, add a free-standing island which will provide generous work space and help direct the flow of traffic without disrupting the kitchen working core.

- The kitchen's work lights can make a difference in the mood of the room. Try installing track lights over cabinets or replace the old ceiling fixture with a new one and include a dimmer to illuminate soft colors or natural woods.

- Another warming touch — paint the kitchen ceiling a surprising pastel blue or rosy pink to highlight the room's best features.

Cook up a little kitchen magic this spring by reassessing what you have, and changing your room's ingredients to blend cupboards, appliances and lighting into a workable whole.

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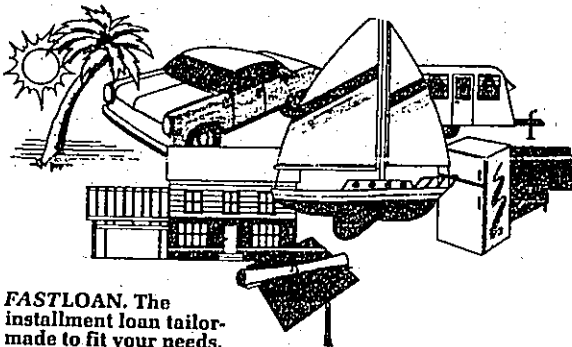
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