



The Kitchen & Bath Insider[®]

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Keeping Your New Kitchen New

You've waited years for your new kitchen, living through the destruction and the construction, the delays and even mistakes. The punch-list is finished and your dream is complete! Your vision has materialized and you finally have your new dream kitchen. So, how will you keep it from soon looking like your old kitchen? What can you do to protect your new showplace from the common household contaminants whose sole purpose is to make your new kitchen look old?

In the *Art of War*, written c.350BC, Sun Tzu, spoke of knowing your adversary. The enemies of a kitchen have not changed since then, so let's begin by looking at what we're up against: grease, steam, heat, kids, pets, and husbands (to name a few). How can we hope to cope with such insurmountable opponents? Sun Tzu would recommend one by one, so we'll start with grease.

If you have wood cabinets, grease buildup should be removed as soon as possible because leaving this contaminant on the wood will eventually eat away the finish. You can use the same soap that you use for your dishes to clean the surface, just dilute it and wipe with a damp rag. If you have a stubborn build-up you can use one of the "orange" cleaners, but test it on the inside of a door before using it on the exposed surfaces.

Grease also comes from your hands and fingers. Remember to clean often around the handles or knobs because before you know it, you'll see a black stains around them. If you wait to long, when you clean the black off, the finish under it will come off as well.

Once the cabinets are cleaned, apply plain-old lemon oil with a clean cloth. It's what our grandparents used and it's still the best protection for any woodwork. Wipe it on, let it sit for a couple of minutes, and wipe off whatever isn't absorbed into the wood. It will keep the cabinets looking good for decades.

Steam, which powered the industrial revolution and made our country great, is not so great for your new kitchen. The heat and humidity of vaporized water is bad for cabinets and counters alike. Hopefully your new kitchen has adequate ventilation above the range or cooktop to draw out these evil vapors. If you find that water is condensing on the cabinets by the range, wipe it off as soon as you can, and talk with your contractor about replacing the hood with a more powerful one. If you have a coffee maker, and keep it on the counter, under the wall cabinets, make sure that you pull it out from under the cabinets when you use it to avoid the steam damaging the underside of the cabinets.

Heat, our friend in winter, is never a friend to our kitchen components. If you didn't replace your oven when you remodeled, check to see if heat is escaping from the sides of the door when in use. The seals that contain the heat within the oven can fail and allow heat to escape, scorching wood and delaminating thermofoil. If the cabinets on the sides of the oven are getting hot, have the seals on the oven replaced or, better yet, buy a new oven. If your toaster is kept on the counter, pull it out from under the cabinets when in use to avoid burning the underside of the cabinets.

Kids are a real challenge when trying to keep your kitchen looking new. They are a source of grease, (see above), dirt, crayon, scratches, etc. Grease, dirt, and crayon can be cleaned as previous described. For scratches, use the touch-up kit that your contractor gave you when he installed the cabinets. If you didn't get one, you can purchase a variety of products at the home-center. Use fill sticks for gouges and touch-up pens for minor scrapes. Remember to always test these products on the inside of a door first.

Pets! If you want to keep your kitchen looking really good, its best to get rid of your pets. If that's not an option de-claw the cats and try to keep the dogs outside at mealtime.

Husbands are the worst offenders of all. Since 350 BC, they have been a source of every contaminant that helps age a new kitchen, yet there is still no solution to the damage that they can do. As with pets, the best advice is to get rid of them. If you can't bring yourself to do that, limit their kitchen time, which will limit your time cleaning up after them.