

Five Kitchen Fix-ups for \$500 or Less

After years of telling yourself you can live with the outdated hardware, the ugly orange laminate countertops and the daffodil-yellow wall paint, you've finally admitted to yourself that your love affair with your kitchen decor is over. But leaving is simply out of the question and you don't have the budget for a complete makeover. What can you do?

Fortunately it is possible to rekindle your love for your kitchen, improve your home's value and accomplish it all on a modest budget. Here are some common kitchen complaints and hints for how you can resolve them -- and learn to love your kitchen again -- for less than \$500 per fix.

Cabinets

Replacing outdated cabinets or even just refacing them can cost thousands of dollars. A more budget-friendly, simple solution is to repaint them and swap outdated hardware for a newer, more contemporary style. Even if you have 20 cabinet door handles to replace and you opt for pricey \$5 knobs and pulls, you can still dramatically upgrade your cabinets' appeal for around \$100.

Painting is another, easier option that helps change the style and appeal of your cabinets. Virtually any kind of cabinet can be painted. Just go online or consult an expert at your local home improvement store to be sure you're using the right kind of paint for your cabinet's material.

Walls

When it comes to budget redesign, paint and wallpaper can be your best friend. Pick a fresh, neutral color to paint the walls. Then spice things up with an easy-to-hang wallpaper mural that evokes your fantasy kitchen. You may never have the breezy, open kitchen in a villa in Tuscany that you dream of, but you can adorn a wall of your kitchen with a wallpaper mural that looks like an open window onto the Tuscan countryside. You'll find plenty of kitchen-appropriate wallpaper murals for under \$100 at www.DecorPlace.com.

Countertops

Replacing laminate countertops with another material can be costly. Few homeowners have the resources to install granite themselves. While replacing laminate with ceramic tile may be more practical for some savvy do-it-yourselfers, an easier option for many people is to simply paint over the laminate they already have. Even if your laminate is scratched, gouged or faded, it's possible to paint it. Use a good quality spackle to fill in cracks, chips, scratches or gouges. Be sure the entire surface is clean and dry, and then apply a coat of bonding primer to help ensure the paint



adheres to the laminate. Next apply two or three coats of paint in your chosen color. Finally, seal the counters with polyurethane. You can get creative by stenciling designs on the surface or faux painting to make the laminate look like granite.

Fixtures

Replacing outdated faucets and sinks is one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to update the look of your kitchen. You can find styles and designs to match every décor and taste for less than \$500. For timeless style and lasting durability, stainless steel sinks are a great choice and many models are available for a few hundred dollars or even less. Visit your local home improvement store to get some ideas for what style will suit your taste and needs. These stores are also great resources for advice on installing your new faucets or sinks -- or go online to find tips in DIY installation.

Appliances

If your appliances look shabby but still work well, refinishing them can be a more cost-effective alternative to replacing them. A stainless steel refrigerator can

cost thousands of dollars, but you can actually put a fresh coat of stainless steel paint on your old, scratched stainless steel, or even your black or white enamel refrigerator for far less. Or, if your enamel appliances better match your kitchen décor, consider repainting them in a designer color using products specially made to bond with the appliance's metal or enamel finish.

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