



**Make the
Most of Your
At-Home
Time**



EASY

5 Steps to Your Most Organized Kitchen EVER

With everyone home under one roof, is your kitchen starting to look a little like this? Then it's time for our most comprehensive guide ever to decluttering, organizing and making the most of your kitchen.

BY ANDREA GOURGY AND ALICIA TYLER, ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARB DIPIETRO

MEET OUR ORGANIZATION EXPERTS

CHEF DAVID BARRY

Associate professor of
culinary arts, Culinary
Institute of America



LORIE MARRERO

Certified professional
organizer and author
of **The Clutter Diet**
(Reason Press, 2009)



JULIE MORGENSTERN

Professional organizer
and author of **Organizing
from the Inside Out**
(Holt/Owl Books, 2004)



PETER WALSH

Organizational
design expert
and author of
It's All Too Much
(Free Press, 2007)



ADRIA VASIL

Green-living expert
and author of
the **Ecoholics**
book series



STEP 1

SET YOUR GOALS, THEN SET UP YOUR KITCHEN...

With everyone stuck at home, your space is likely a lot messier right about now—ours are. There's no rhyme or reason to your pantry, items are stored too far away when you need 'em fast and booby-trap cupboards you're afraid to open. We get it and we're here to help.

The state of organization in your pantry – as well as the rest of your kitchen – has a direct impact on how well you stick to your healthy eating goals. Some experts, such as organizational design expert Peter Walsh, go so far as to argue that the clutter in your kitchen goes hand in hand with excess weight, couple that with a health crisis and this becomes doubly important.

In his upcoming book, *Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight* (Rodale, 2015), Walsh contends that a cluttered environment might be a factor in making poor food choices. He points to a 2013 study where researchers asked students to answer a questionnaire in either an orderly room or a messy room. When the students were leaving the room, they were given a choice of a snack – either an apple or a candy bar. Interestingly enough, those leaving the clean room were likely to opt for the apple while those leaving the messy room more often chose the candy bar.

Of course, Walsh doesn't argue that clutter causes weight gain directly, but he does believe there is a relationship. According to him, both are a type of imbalance – if you're overweight, you're taking in too many calories; if you have a cluttered home, you're taking too much stuff into your home.

But once you've set your mind to correcting that imbalance and decluttering your home, where do you start? Jumping right into organizing can be difficult if you haven't set goals for yourself. Professional organizer Julie Morgenstern suggests asking how you can best set up your pantry or fridge to support your clean-eating values, habits and routines. For example, if you want to juice more often, you might consider setting up a corner as a juicing station, or keeping a spot in your fridge where you store your juicing ingredients. This is why mapping out your goals should always be the first step in organizing your kitchen.

In this section, we've reached out to some of the top experts in the field – from professional organizers to a chef and even an expert in green living – for their top tips on reorganizing your fridge, pantry and countertops. Let's get started!

SAVVY SORTING

Once you've determined your clean-eating goals, reorganizing an area of your kitchen, like your pantry or fridge, becomes a lot easier. Julie Morgenstern suggests a five-step process, which she refers to as SPACE. The SPACE system helps to give context when you are sorting through your belongings to see what fits – or doesn't fit – within the goals you've set for yourself. Apply the SPACE system to every section of your kitchen and home that needs attention.

SPACE

SORT

Pull items out and group similar items; take inventory of what you have.

PURGE

Get rid of anything that doesn't fit within your current goals; donate anything that hasn't expired and toss the rest.

ASSIGN A HOME

Put things you use often in easier-to-reach areas. **Flip to page XX for more information on mapping out your space.**

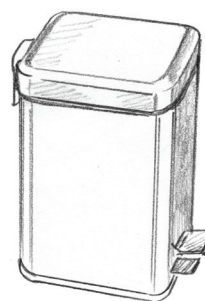
CONTAINERS

Once you know where things will go, you can purchase the appropriate-sized containers for the space where needed.

EQUALIZE

After you're all set up, you need to maintain your system; clean as you go to keep everything organized and tidy.

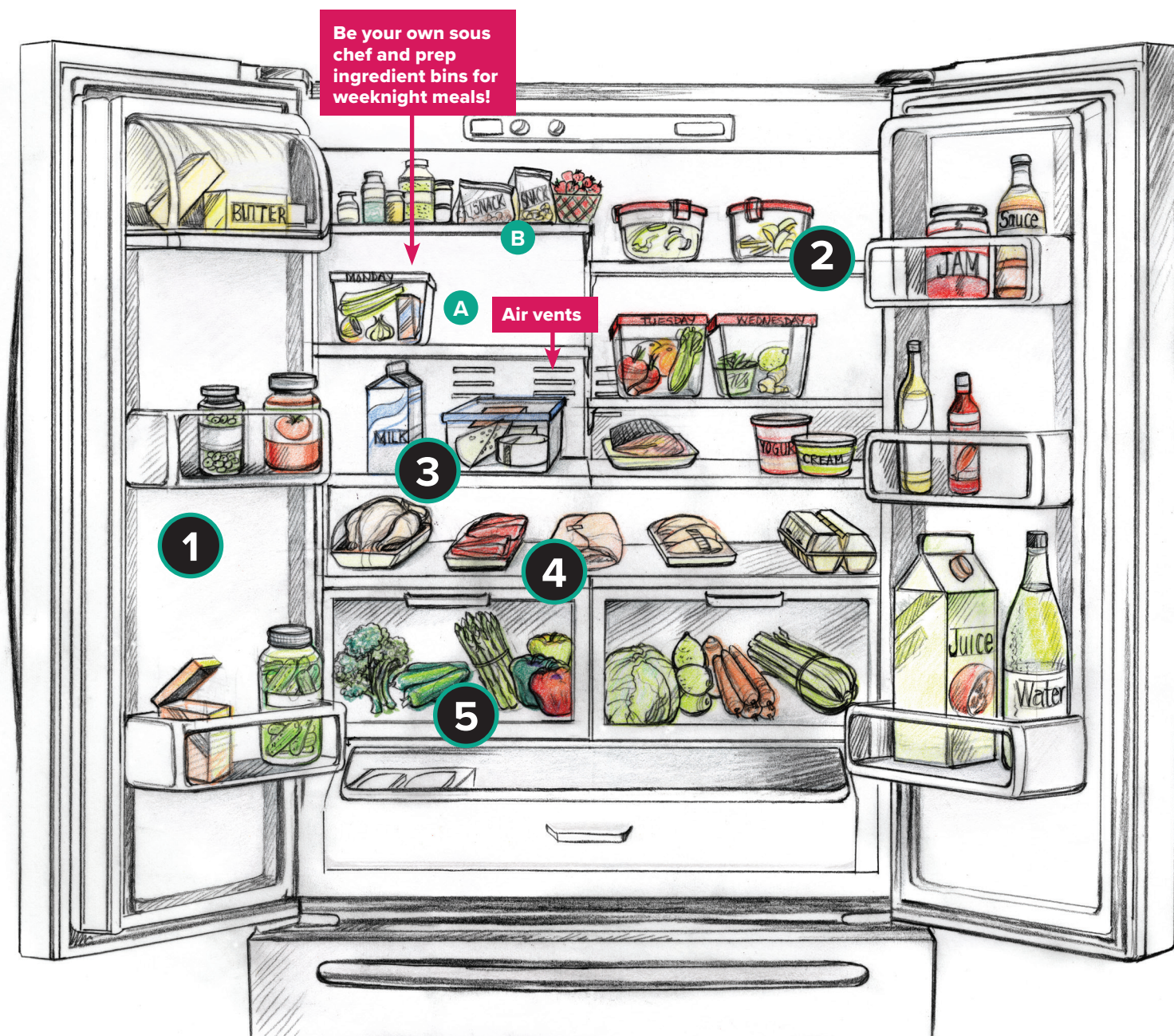
Instead of thinking of kitchen maintenance as ordinary cleaning, Morgenstern suggests approaching it as “setting things up for their next use,” which feels more intentional.



STEP 2

ORGANIZE YOUR FRIDGE LIKE A PRO

When deciding what to place where in the fridge, there are two main issues to consider: functionality and food safety. Chef David Barry, associate professor of culinary arts at the Culinary Institute of America, shares his expert guidelines for organizing your fridge to incorporate the best of both elements.



- 1 **Put more temperature-stable items, such as dressings, juices and condiments, in door compartments.** The temperature in this zone fluctuates every time you open and shut the door, so temperature-sensitive ingredients like eggs shouldn't be stored here. Make sure to store butter in the butter compartment, as the door of this compartment is designed to protect oils and fats from picking up other aromas within the fridge.
- 2 **Keep your leftovers, snacks and other ready-to-eat foods on the upper shelves of your fridge.** Because you may not cook these items before eating, you don't want to keep them on a lower shelf and risk having something else leak onto them.
- 3 **Have a look inside your fridge and locate the air vent, usually at the back wall of the fridge.** This is the coldest spot in your fridge, so keep your dairy and fish towards the back of this shelf.
- 4 **Raw proteins (chicken, beef, eggs, etc.) should be kept on the lowest shelf to avoid leakage onto other foods.** Most fridges will have this shelf sealed so that there is limited risk of leakage into the crisper. If your shelf doesn't have a seal, make sure to put your proteins in a bowl or container.
- 5 **Keep your vegetables in the crisper either out of bags or loosely covered, as produce kept tightly in bags will spoil faster.** If you have two crispers that are stacked, keep the produce that will be cooked in the upper crisper, and the produce that will be eaten raw in the lower crisper (in case of an accidental leak from food on the shelves above, cooking those veggies will kill off harmful bacteria).

FACT

You're more likely to succeed with your clean-eating goals when your fridge is clean and organized.

TEMPERATURE CHECK

The temperature of your fridge should always be at or below 40°F. If your fridge doesn't have a temperature display, an inexpensive fridge thermometer can help make sure the temperature is always in the right range. And what if frost is building up in your fridge? While humid weather can sometimes contribute to this, frost buildup usually means someone is leaving the door open too long or one of the door gaskets is not properly sealing when it's closed, according to Barry.

A THE BENEFITS

OF BINS Don't have a lot of time to cook during the week? Julie Morgenstern urges you to "be your own sous chef" by assembling and prepping ingredients for meals on the weekend and placing the prepared ingredients for each meal into individual bins labeled for the day of the week they'll be used. When you're ready to cook, simply pull the appropriate bin out of the fridge and you have all your ingredients ready to go. Bins and lazy Susans can also be used to group similar items such as cheeses, leftovers or lunch meats. Morgenstern says bins work well in the fridge to add order, structure and visibility to things that don't stand up on their own.

B SNACK WELL

Always keep portion-controlled snacks handy so that you can just grab and go, recommends Peter Walsh. That way when you or your children open the fridge, you have the appropriate healthy snack waiting. Choose from four creative snacks on page 70.

TO REFRIGERATE OR NOT TO REFRIGERATE?

Unsure of what fruits and vegetables to refrigerate and what to leave out on your countertop? Barry says when in doubt, look to how things are stored in the supermarket. The food industry spends a lot of time and money figuring out the best ways to store produce for lasting freshness, so that's usually a very good indicator of how they should be stored at home.

DON'T: Tomatoes, onions, potatoes, apples, pears and tropical fruits such as avocados, bananas, kiwis and papayas.

DO: Salad greens such as spinach, arugula and kale, cucumbers, bell peppers, asparagus, carrots, eggplant, oranges, broccoli and cauliflower. Even though it's safe to keep items like tomatoes, onions and potatoes on your countertop, remember that once they're cut up, they have to go into the fridge for food safety reasons.

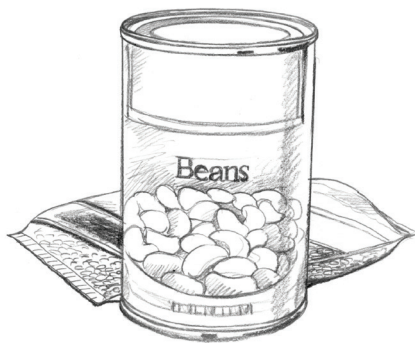
STEP 3

ZONE IN ON YOUR PANTRY

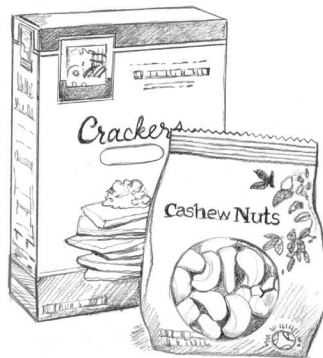
How do you decide where everything should go in your pantry? Julie Morgenstern suggests thinking of your pantry in terms of zones, or areas, where different types of foods live. A typical clean pantry could be organized into categories such as these:

- ☐ BEANS & LENTILS
- ☐ SNACKS
- ☐ SPICES
- ☐ SAUCES & BROTHS
- ☐ OILS & VINEGARS
- ☐ PASTAS & GRAINS

These zones are flexible, depending on your needs. If you're a frequent baker, then baking staples can be given their own zone. Store spices, oils and vinegars close enough to your cooking station for easy access, but remember that they should be kept in a cool, dark area for ultimate freshness. And keep things that are used more often, like snacks for example, in easier-to-reach areas.



BEANS & LENTILS



SNACKS



SAUCES &
BROTHS



OILS & VINEGARS



SPICES



PASTA & GRAINS

ARE YOU TOOL HAPPY?



To assess which tools you really use, Peter Walsh suggests taking the one-month cardboard box test: Put a cardboard-box on the kitchen counter and take everything out of your gizmo drawer and put it in the box. Every time you use one of those gizmos from the box, put it back in the drawer. At the end of the month, if it's still in the box, you likely don't need it and should consider donating it (with the exception of maybe your turkey baster, Walsh notes).

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR AN ORDERLY KITCHEN

DO have an area near your front door where your keys, purse, mail and other items live, according to Peter Walsh. That way, those things don't end up making their way into your kitchen or getting lost.



DON'T transfer all pantry items to containers. Most of the time this is wasted effort, according to certified professional organizer Lorie Marrero. Her advice is to use containers selectively – they're mostly necessary for items you pick up in the bulk department. She also suggests choosing rectangular and square containers over rounded jars to use your space most efficiently.



DO a reckoning of your food-storage containers at least once a year, advises Marrero. She suggests matching up each container with the lid it belongs to and separating out any "orphans" that remain. Save the orphan containers and lids in a bag for a week before donating them to Goodwill – that way if their mates turn up, she says, you can still rescue them from the orphan bag in time.



DON'T label everything in your pantry. Marrero says if you have a jar of fig bars in there, for example, you don't need to label them. But if you have multiple flours in containers that all look the same, definitely label them. Marrero is a proponent of labeling your shelves, however, to keep track of where everything belongs in the pantry.



DO go digital to save space in your kitchen. Marrero suggests using software such as Evernote to organize your favorite recipes and read them off your tablet while you cook – that way you don't have to keep all your cookbooks in the kitchen. Alternatively, she suggests scanning and printing recipes and keeping them in a binder in the kitchen for quick access.



STEP 4

CONSIDER THE MAGIC TRIANGLE

The magic triangle is the area in your kitchen where all the action happens. Depending on the layout of your space, the triangle can be formed by the cooktop, refrigerator and oven.

You spend most of your time in the kitchen within that work triangle, and for this reason, Peter Walsh recommends only keeping items you use frequently within or on the edges of the triangle. Think of it as the most valuable real estate in your kitchen. If you are an avid baker and use a whisk almost daily, then by all means, keep it in a container or a drawer in the magic triangle – if not, it can be demoted to a less central place in your kitchen.

Only keep items on the countertop that you use often, such as a blender if you prepare daily smoothies.



Walsh firmly believes in keeping as much off the countertop as possible – in his own home, he even keeps his knife block in a drawer. “If the countertop is clear,” he explains, “it says, this room is ready for action; it welcomes you. It says this space is ready for you to get started immediately.”

STEP 5

YOUR KITCHEN IS IMPECCABLE NOW KEEP IT UP

You can spend days getting your kitchen in perfect order, but without a commitment from you and your family to regularly uphold the new system, it'll revert back to an unruly mess in no time. Try posting chores in a prominent place in your kitchen, or rotating them between different family members to make sure everyone participates in maintaining your clean kitchen.

FRIDGE: Edit the contents of your fridge weekly to use up any items before they go off. Lorie Marrero suggests hooking this habit to garbage-collection day so that any smelly foods that need to be tossed will be taken away immediately. **Clean Eating** recommends disinfecting refrigerator shelves every two months, and spot-cleaning any spills as they happen.

PANTRY: Edit the contents of your pantry every season, and disinfect the pantry shelves twice per year, cleaning up any spills as they occur.

OVEN: According to green-living expert Adria Vasil, you don't need to use toxic cleaners to keep your oven spotless. She suggests sprinkling baking soda over the bottom of the oven until it's coated. Drizzle hot or boiled water over top. With rubber gloves, swirl the water and baking soda around to combine. Let it sit overnight, then scrub with an abrasive sponge. **CE** recommends cleaning your oven twice a year, or as needed, and spot-clean accidental spills as soon as the oven is cool enough.

DISHWASHER: Clean your dishwasher about once a month. Use a soapy, hard-bristled toothbrush to brush some of the harder-to-reach nooks and crannies, then fill a dishwasher-safe cup with white vinegar, put it upright on the top shelf and run the cycle with hot water to kill off any mold or bacteria.

GARBAGE BINS: Wash them out once per month, or weekly for bins with leaky food waste or compost bins, suggests Vasil. Keep them smelling fresh by sprinkling baking soda at the bottom, and a few drops of essential oil of your choice.

THE SUNDAY RITUAL: If you find yourself coming home from work with no idea what's going on the dinner table, consider implementing a regular meal-planning routine. Planning your meals ahead of time doesn't have to be complicated, though. Peter Walsh suggests sitting down with your family for 10 minutes on Sunday deciding what meals you want for the week, making a list of meals, then a shopping list. "It's not rocket science," Walsh jokes. Luckily, everything you need is within your hands. A great place to start? Page 14.

