Small Kitchen Recycling Center

by Paul B. Turpin

Figure 1. One-stop recycling center: *This 33-inch sink base includes two door-mounted containers for trash and recyclables, a sink with rear-mounted drains and disposal, a separate compost bucket, and false-front trays for dishwashing utensils.*

The problem of what gets thrown away and how has changed a lot over the last decade. Recycling is on its way to becoming a regular part of life. Also, many urban, as well as rural, consumers have gotten in the habit of composting organic waste to lower the volume of disposed trash, and to feed flower beds and vegetable gardens.

But few kitchens are set up to handle several categories of waste products. Older kitchens often had floor space available for a trash can. But modern kitchens are usually filled with cabinets, making floor space hard to come by and pushing trash containers into the cabinets. And now with the need for several containers, the situation is only worse.

Fitting It All Under the Sink

The basic materials-handling equation is simple: the smaller the containers inside the kitchen, the more frequent the trips to empty them. If your client has a large kitchen, you may be able to incorporate separate bins so trash can be sorted on the spot. And these containers may be large enough to keep trips to the garage or the back porch to a minimum.

The small kitchen is a tougher proposition. The containers have to be smaller, and typically recycleables are mixed together in one bin. But it's still possible to efficiently fit trash, recycling, compost, and disposal, into a 33-inch sink base cabinet.

Disregarding the disposal for a minute, there are four basic components to consider: waste container, recycling bin, compost bucket, and the sink itself. I mount the waste and recycling containers on the two cabinet doors (see Figure 1).

My favorite waste container is Hafele's "Built-in Waste Bin" (Hafele America Co., 16926-A S. Keegan Ave., Carson, CA 90746; 800/821-5423 or 800/421-0663 in California). At $30 to $50, it features a self-closing lid on a removable plastic bucket that attaches to the door. It's available with a 4-gallon or 5 1/4-gallon bucket.

I mount a recycling hamper on the other door. I use a 5-gallon "Rack-Sack" (Extrufix, Inc., 4542 L.B. McLeod Rd., Orlando, FL 32811; 800/327-9780). This wire frame waste container uses a standard supermarket plastic shopping bag, and comes equipped with a lid. It costs about $17. It comes in 1-gallon, 3-gallon, and 5-gallon sizes, making it an option for waste containers in other cabinets.

For compost, I suggest my clients buy a sturdy plastic container with an airtight lid and keep it under the sink where it can be emptied frequently. I don't try to build this one in. I do suggest that they limit its contents to fresh vegetable and fruit trimmings. Cooked food scraps and animal products attract rats and other objectionable creatures to a compost pile, and should go down the disposal.

All of these containers act as staging areas. When the trash is full, it has to be emptied into the garbage can. When the recycling bag fills up, it should be sorted into larger containers. I use four, 5-gallon Rubbermaid containers at my house, and when they're full, I sort into separate 40-gallon trash cans. If your clients have curbside pickup, they can cut down on the size of the containers and the staging area.

The final component is the kitchen sink. The two containers that attach to the doors take up a good deal of space inside the sink base, so not all sinks will work with them. The one I use most often is Kohler's *Executive Chef*. Its main virtue is that its basin drains are located at the rear. This pushes the sink's waste pipes, including the disposal, to the back of the sink base, creating extra room at the front for the waste and recycling containers.

The space below the sink is tight, and you must figure the dimensions of all the components carefully if everything's going to fit. It often has a clearance of less than 1/4 inch.

But still there's a bit of space that can be used for storage — the area behind the false drawer fronts. To take advantage of this space, I use "false front trays" (Amerock Corp., PO Box 7018, Rockford, IL 61125-7018; 800/435-6959).

When You've Got More Space

An alternative for large kitchens with available cabinet space is a pull-out trash drawer. Amerock, Hafele, and Feeney Manufacturing Co. (PO Box 191, Muncie, IN 47308; 317/288-8730) all make variations on a slide-out trash container that fit standard base cabinets. But you or your cabinet sub can make a unit that matches the rest of the kitchen and doesn't require any hands to operate.

Here's how. Make a drawer deep and wide enough to hold the plastic trash container of choice. Attach a cabinet door (as if it were a drawer front) to your large drawer body. Then, mount a set of heavy-duty full-extension drawer slides so that they're tilted down slightly from the back of the cabinet to the front (see Figure 2, previous page).

Now attach a positive-hook touch latch and presto. A little pressure from your knee will release the touch latch, and the weight of the drawer combined with the down-hill tilt of the slides, will roll the unit out on its own. You can then slide the drawer shut with either your knee or your hand.

There are a couple of things to watch out for. First, you don't need much tilt for the slides. The first time I made one, I put the slides at about 30 degrees, and the drawer came shooting out like a roller coaster that had jumped the tracks. Also, since the drawer moves down slightly as well as out, you have to provide enough clearance so the bottom of the drawer clears the bottom of the cabinet. ■

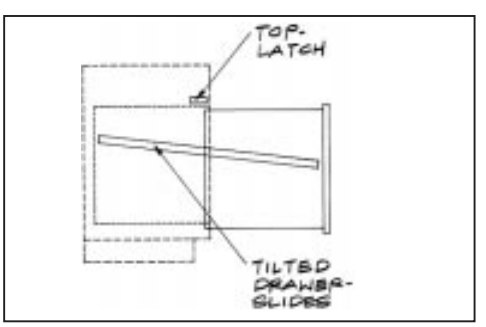

Figure 2. Self-opening oversized drawer for trash or recyclables opens with a touch: *A touch latch and downward-sloping drawer slides help the drawer open easily.*

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