

Updating the Kitchen Pantry

By using both manufactured and shop-built parts, these versatile cabinets can be made quickly and efficiently

BY DAVID GETTS



Every kitchen needs a pantry. A floor-to-ceiling cabinet with either shop-made rollouts, like this one, or manufactured components offers a great deal of convenient food storage without sacrificing much floor space in the kitchen.

Manufactured components come in many styles and speed construction

Pantry components made for the cabinet industry offer many food-storage options. There's no reason that small shops should not take advantage of what's there. All you really need is a box to mount the components in—that's what makes them such an attractive alternative to building your own.



Wire baskets are lightweight and simple to install

Epoxy-coated baskets (photo left) are made with integral drawer slides that are screwed to the inside walls of the cabinet. Baskets can be mounted individually in a cabinet rather than as a set, so you can put them wherever they work best. And because they are made of wire mesh, they give the illusion of more space inside the cabinet. The downside, of course, is that a basket will not contain spills (a consideration if you have young children who may not always put away the Cheerios right side up). Wire baskets come in a variety of widths. They are one of the least expensive options among manufactured pantry components.

It's hard to forget the first big kitchen pantry I encountered 20 years ago. This one was a marvel of interlocking wooden components—swiveling shelves, pullout storage bins, spice racks—all in a dark-stained, varnished wood. It represented a daunting amount of labor, which probably explains why I don't build many pantry interiors like that these days.

Pantries are among the most useful cabinets in any kitchen; the floor-to-ceiling repositories hold everything from canned soup to tubs of rice. They can consist entirely of rollout shelves (top photo, facing page) or include a combination of shop-made shelves, rollouts and manufactured components such as rollout wire shelving and baskets, door-mounted racks and spice organizers. Available from at least three major manufacturers (see sources of pantry hardware, p. 77), these components fit in either traditional face-frame or European-style frameless cabinets.

Some shop-made components still make sense, particularly if you build them from the same materials that are used throughout the rest of the kitchen. Adjustable wooden shelves and rollouts are not difficult to make, and they help to blend the pantry with the other kitchen cabinets. Interestingly, though, many of the people I make

cabinets for prefer wire components over wood—they find them easier to clean.

You need to start with a well-designed cabinet box

One of the big advantages of building custom cabinets is that you can build exactly what you want. But remember that manufactured pantry components are intended to fit inside cabinets in one of several standard outside widths: 24 in., 30 in., 36 in., 42 in. and 48 in. Fitting components into a really odd-size cabinet may require a lot of fussing with shims and spacers to get hardware to fit. It's smart to have the hardware on hand as you design and build the pantry.

Pantries are usually full-height units that run from the floor to the top of the upper cabinets. I try to design the cabinet so that the main doors are no taller than 5 ft. Doors more than 60 in. high have a greater tendency to warp, and accessibility is reduced for anything too far off the floor.

When a pantry is integrated with standard kitchen base units, it usually is 24 in. deep so that all the cabinet faces line up. One advantage with the 24-in. depth is the budget. Both sides of the cabinet can be cut from a single sheet of plywood or melamine. But when I have

a choice, I like to make pantry cabinets 26 in. deep. Here's why: With a standard 1½-in. overhang on a 24-in. deep cabinet, the countertop extends 25½ in. from the wall. By making the pantry 26 in. deep, the



Rollout units often fit several cabinet heights

These units are similar to the baskets except that all the drawers are installed as a set. They are a good choice when you want to fill a good bit of a cabinet interior with a single component. These units, such as the Rev-a-Shelf Pull Out Pantry (photo left), are easy to install, and they work well as a retrofit for an existing cabinet because the frame telescopes to fit a range of interior cabinet heights. These shelves take up less space than shop-fabricated drawers. Installation is speedy because you don't have to measure the location for each drawer; just screw in the frame and put the shelves in their indexed slots.

edge of the counter can die into the side of the cabinet rather than project out from the cabinet edge.

Whether you choose plywood or melamine for the cabinet, you should use $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. stock. Melamine, a low-pressure laminate bonded to a particleboard core, is cheaper than plywood and easy to clean. The downside is that it chips easily and can be damaged when exposed to standing water. Plus, it's heavy. The alternative is hardwood plywood, which is lighter and easier to handle, is stronger and cuts cleaner. If I use plywood, I prefer maple because of its light color and subtle figure. Stay away from open-grained woods like oak. They are more difficult to clean.

Shop-made shelves are a basic pantry option

Shelves make the most of storage space, although getting to the back of a 24-in. deep shelf isn't always easy. Shelf material should be a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick—anything less will sag. A $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. shelf should never span more than 36 in. if unsupported in the middle. If a shelf

will be wider than that, either add solid-wood edging to the face or use 1-in. thick material. Veneer-core plywood resists sagging better than particleboard or medium-density fiberboard.

Shelves made from plywood or melamine should be edgebanded. For plywood cabinets, I edgeband either with wood veneer of the same species or $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. thick solid wood (the $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. material is more durable). If you're using melamine, the banding material can be a matching plastic laminate, PVC or melamine edgebanding.

Adjustable shelves make the cabinet more flexible, and they simplify construction. The two basic approaches are to plow a dado to receive a metal or plastic shelf standard, or to drill evenly spaced holes for shelf pins. I prefer the shelf pins because they're less expensive and because they look better.

Drawers make access to the inside of a pantry easy

Rollouts are shallow drawers concealed behind doors, and they make it much easier to get to stuff stored at the back of a cabinet. Although you can buy manufactured units, you may want to build your own so that they match materials used in the rest of the kitchen. Drawer height is your call, but 3 in. is a good standard. When using three-quarter extension slides in a frameless cabinet, the width of the drawer is typically 2 in. less than the cabinet interior. That



Swing-out units require a center partition

Larger and more elaborate, swing-out racks such as the Feeny Pantry Mate (photo left) require a vertical panel in the center of the cabinet. Racks are hinged to this panel, and they swing completely out of the cabinet, not only providing easy access to anything you store on them but also allowing you to install narrow shelves behind the racks at the back of the cabinet. Swing-out racks are ideal for storing things you want to see easily, but their lighter-weight construction makes them best suited to smaller items.

allows 1 in. for the drawer slides (½ in. on each side) and a ½-in. spacer on each side so that the drawer doesn't bang into the door as it's opened (photo far right). For full-extension slides, I like to use a heavier-duty ¾-in. spacer, which requires that the drawer box be 2½ in. less than the cabinet opening. Spacers are available from Blum (800-438-6788) and Bainbridge Manufacturing (800-255-4702).

You also can use zero-protrusion cup hinges from Blum, which allow the door to swing completely out of the way (photo right). In that case, drawer slides can be mounted directly to the interior of the case—no need for any spacers.

A three-quarter extension slide is mounted to the bottom of the drawer side, so it hides the bottom edge of the drawer. You can simply glue and staple the ¼-in. plywood bottom right to the drawer box. These drawers are good only for light things. I think pantry rollouts should have a ½-in. bottom. Full-extension slides mount to the side of the box, not the bottom edge, requiring that the bottom be let into a groove around the inside of the drawer box.

The three-quarter extension slides are less expensive. I've had good luck with the Blum #210, which is a white, epoxy-coated slide. They operate smoothly and are easy to install. But they allow easy access to only three-quarters of the drawer box. I encourage people to spend a



When space is tight, get the right hinge. A zero-protrusion hinge from Blum allows a cabinet door to swing completely out of the way for a rollout shelf.



Plastic spacers are neat and uniform. These ¾-in. spacers move the side of the drawer in a little so that it won't clip the edge of the open door.

little more money and get full-extension slides. I use model #3834 from Accuride (562-903-0200). Full-extension slides operate smoothly on ball bearings and have a higher weight rating than three-quarter extension slides (typically 100 lb. vs. 75 lb.). □

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Door ladders make the most of interior space

Why waste all that space on the back of the door? Door ladders and spice racks screwed to the inside surface of a door open up a lot of additional storage (photo left). They are about 4½ in. deep, so they don't take up too much room (but don't forget to size drawers and shelves accordingly). They are ideal for smaller, frequently used items and are easily adjustable. The wire shelves simply hang off the rack, so they can be moved up or down in a few seconds.

Sources of pantry hardware

FEENY

2700 Oak Industrial Drive NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49505
(616) 459-3311
www.kv.com

HAFELE AMERICA COMPANY

3901 Cheyenne Drive
P. O. Box 4000
Archdale, NC 27263
(800) 423-3531
www.hafelus.com

REV-A-SHELF

P. O. Box 99585
Jeffersontown, KY 40299
(800) 626-1126
www.rev-a-shelf.com