

Choose the Right Kitchen Sink



Follow these three steps to take your sink from a dingy dumping ground to a functional focal point

BY CLAIR URBAIN

Whether you're just fantasizing about your dream kitchen or are ready to roll up your sleeves to replace that chipped, stained, clumsy sink that's been there far too long, there are many options to consider when choosing this crucial kitchen fixture. What do you like and dislike about the sink you have? Is it too deep, too shallow, too big, or too small? What look are you trying to achieve, and what type of countertops do you have? You also need to consider how you use the sink, because an avid chef will have entirely different needs from a microwave master who serves quick-and-easy meals. To help navigate the countless options, break the decision into three areas: layout, material, and installation type.

Clair Urbain is a freelance writer in Fort Atkinson, Wis. Photos courtesy of the manufacturers, except where noted.



Bowl shape and orientation Bowls with straighter sides and tighter corner radii have more capacity. D-shaped bowls (1) with a curved back provide more room for maneuvering large pans but may require moving the faucet to the countertop behind the sink.

In corners or in tight locations, L-shaped sinks (2) or a sink placed on the diagonal may make better use of space.

Consider accessories First and foremost, make sure that the sink you choose can accommodate the faucet you want to mount to it. Does the sink have enough holes (4) for accessories, such as a sprayer and dispensers for soap and hot water? Do you need a dishwasher drain vent?

If you have your heart set on a certain sink but find that it has too many holes, you can attractively hide the holes you don't need with hole covers or extended baseplates.

Bowl depth Because the standard sink-bowl depth is only about 8 in., dumping large pans or spraying down the sink can cause splashing. If you plan on washing large pans regularly, consider a sink with a 9-in.- or 10-in.-deep bowl. Some models have a lowered lip between the two bowls so that large pans can straddle both bowls comfortably and catch splashes during cleanup.

Think about how bowl depth will be experienced by users of different heights. If the bowl is too deep, it may be hard for a shorter person to reach to the bottom and may make a taller person stoop too much.



Number of bowls Decide how many bowls you need based on the size of your kitchen and your typical activities in it. A large, single-bowl sink can be the best choice if you have a small kitchen or if you plan to wash most of your dishes in a dishwasher. Double bowls of equal size work well with multiple cooks in the kitchen, but if one cook focuses on prep work, a double-bowl design that includes a half-size or ¾-size bowl may be a better solution. Offset or shallow/deep double bowls and triple bowls (3) are becoming more common and may be better matches for your style of cooking and living. With a triple-bowl sink, one bowl can be used for dirty dishes, another can accept food scraps for the garbage disposal, and the third can be available for soaking or hand-washing. This luxury often means installing nonstandard cabinetry to accommodate a larger sink footprint.

**Kohler
K-3346-3-NA**



1

Blanco 440250



2

Franke AMX 671-E



3

**Premier Copper Products
KTDB422210**



4

Kohler K-6626-5-0

CHOOSE A LAYOUT Sink manufacturers continue to develop the look and configuration of sinks so that they better match the needs of today's users. A wide variety of bowl configurations allows you to match sink type to the type of cooking, cleaning, and other chores you do. The type of faucet you choose and other accessories you may want to add, such as soap or hot-water dispensers, also affect your sink decision.

SELECT THE SINK MATERIAL

The decision process begins with a spectrum of materials ranging from steel to stone. With such a wide selection of mainstream and niche manufacturers, it's not hard to find examples of traditional or modern styling within each material category.



Blanco 441292

Composite

Composite sinks, best known by brand names such as Moenstone, Silgranit, Americast, and Swanstone, are made with a mixture of materials—usually quartz or granite—and a bonding agent. This combination produces a good-looking, resilient natural surface that can resist temperatures up to 500°F. Composite surfaces are also less vulnerable to dents and chips from dropped silverware or pans.

From a cost standpoint, composite sinks are an economical alternative to natural-stone sinks. They typically run between \$200 and \$700, but higher-end styles that incorporate drain boards cost nearly \$1000. Expect to pay more for undermount sinks and multibowl models.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Very durable; resistant to heat; can be a convincing alternative to granite and other natural stones. **Cons** Moderately expensive.

Fireclay

Fireclay sinks are not only strong and beautiful, but they're also resistant to contamination and food-bacteria buildup. Unlike on enameled sinks, the glaze on fireclay is an inseparable part of the sink, rather than a coating. This means that fireclay generally can withstand much more abuse than porcelain-enameled cast iron. While strong, the fireclay surface can scratch, chip, and show burns. Also, fireclay sinks are comparatively brittle and may be incompatible with garbage disposals.

Fireclay can be cleaned with regular cleaners. Many fireclay sinks can even handle mildly abrasive cleaners, although nonabrasive varieties are recommended for everyday cleaning. Prices start at about \$500, but can go as high as \$2500 to \$3000.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Hygienic; strong; more durable than enameled sinks. **Cons** More brittle and may not be compatible with garbage disposals.



Kohler K-14572-T6-W2



Stainless steel

Stainless steel is a popular material because it cleans easily, resists staining, withstands a wide range of temperatures, and is a fairly good value. It's also a natural complement to the stainless-steel appliances popular in today's kitchens.

The thickness of stainless steel is measured by gauge—the higher the gauge number, the thinner the steel. Typically, commercial-grade sinks are made with 16-ga. steel, and the cheapest residential sinks are made with 23-ga. steel, which is noticeably thin, especially when saddled with a vibrating garbage disposal. Models with sound-absorbing undercoatings can muffle some of the noise from dish clatter and garbage-disposal

use; this also helps to insulate the sink to reduce heat conduction from hot dishwasher.

Because stainless steel is such a popular sink material, there is a wide variety of styles, and price closely follows steel gauge and complexity of bowl design. Typically, undermount stainless-steel sinks are slightly to substantially more expensive than drop-in models. Residential-grade, single-bowl kitchen sinks can be found for as little as \$80; midgrade sinks cost from \$100 to \$400; high-end residential models are more than \$500; and commercial-grade sinks can easily surpass \$1000.

Most stainless-steel sinks have a brushed-satin finish, but higher-end and designer sinks may be highly polished. The satin finish does a better job of hiding minor scratches.

Stainless steel cleans up well with only soap and water and a quick towel dry, which helps the surface to form a strong, highly protective chrome-oxide film. Stubborn stains can be scoured lightly with a mild abrasive rubbed in the direction of the grain and then rinsed. Don't use steel wool on stainless-steel sinks because small particles can become embedded in the stainless steel and then rust.

Be sure to check that the model you choose is made from high-quality 304 stainless steel and that it meets ASME A112.19.3-2000 criteria for stainless-steel plumbing fixtures. Both pieces of information should be noted in the sink's specifications.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Stain- and heat-resistant; easy to clean; a fairly good value; available in many shapes and sizes. **Cons** Light-gauge models can be flimsy and noisy; highly polished sinks can show scratches.

Enamel-on-cast-iron or enamel-on-steel sinks are available in a wide variety of colors and are easy to clean. They can take the shock of a hot pan or pot being placed in them, but their rigid enamel coating can chip and crack if heavy items are dropped on them. A crack in the enamel will expose the cast iron or steel to water and air, which encourages rusting.

Enamel sinks can be dulled by aggressive cleaning, which can lead to more dirt accumulation and staining. Enamel-on-steel sinks tend to be the least expensive sinks, with models beginning at \$150. Enamel-on-cast-iron sinks start at about \$200.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Available in many colors; solid-feeling and heavy. **Cons** Susceptible to chips and cracks; relatively heavy weight may complicate undermount installations.

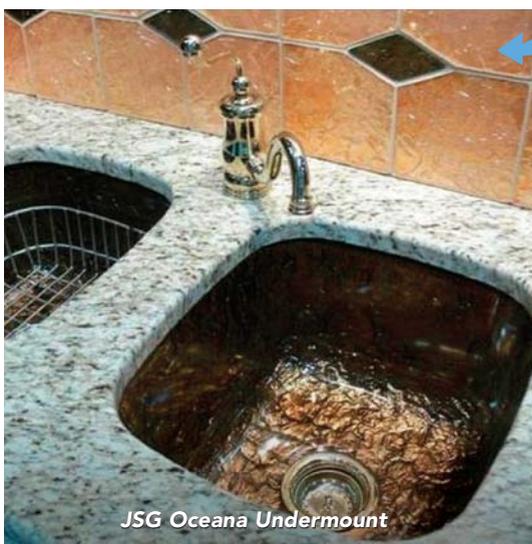
Enameled



Glass

Although they constitute a small niche, glass kitchen sinks exist. One manufacturer is Jeannette Specialty Glass/JSG Oceana, a company that uses a special borosilicate glass commonly found in cooking and refrigeration applications and in pharmaceutical laboratories. The company claims that the glass has a low coefficient of expansion, can take repeated temperature shocks from boiling water, and is highly resistant to nonfluorinated chemicals, so its surface retains its clear and lustrous qualities over time and after repeated cleaning. Although it's scratch resistant and can stand up to bumps and drops from normal use, like porcelain, it can break from blows by heavy objects. JSG Oceana glass sinks are available in top-mount and undermount configurations, but they also can be free-formed for high-end kitchens. Standard bowl-type sinks cost around \$400, and an undermount sink used in a double-sink configuration runs around \$900 per sink. Custom sinks are priced based on specifications and desired look.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Unique look; tolerant of high temperatures and temperature shocks. **Cons** Can be severely damaged by hard impacts; limited number of manufacturers to choose from; may not be aesthetically compatible with all countertop options.



SELECT THE SINK MATERIAL CONTINUED

Acrylic

Acrylic sinks are light yet sturdy; come in a wide variety of colors, patterns, and shapes; and are less expensive than most other sinks. They are more vulnerable to scratches, however, and they have a low luster when compared with quartz or granite composites. Also, be careful where you put that hot pan; temperatures over 300°F can damage acrylic.

The material used in solid-surface counters, known under brand names such as Corian or Silestone, also can be molded into sinks. Because the material is the same all the way through the sink profile, minor scratches can be buffed out. However, temperatures greater than 300°F may cause damage from melting.

Figure on paying \$100 to \$400 for simple to midrange sink designs and \$500 or more for high-end models.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Economical alternative to other sinks; lots of color options; solid composition means scratches can be buffed out. **Cons** Sensitive to high temperatures; typically limited to undermount installations.



DuPont Corian 850 Double Sink

Natural stone



Green Mountain Soapstone Double Bowl

Stone sinks can make bold design statements. They are hewn from solid rock such as granite, marble, quartz, limestone, sandstone, onyx, travertine, or soapstone. Semiprecious materials such as fossil wood also can be used.

Although several manufacturers and artisans sell standard styles of natural-stone sinks, the crystalline structure and veining of the material makes each sink unique. Few materials are more durable than rock, but because all rock formations are porous, these sinks must be sealed before use. Also, many types of stone have natural pocks and imperfections that must be filled with stone dust and epoxy, matching the natural stone as much as possible.

Typically, stone kitchen sinks cost between \$500 and \$1500, but prices can go much higher depending on the variety of stone and level of customization.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Very durable; good sound-deadening properties. **Cons** High price; may require sealing; heavy weight may complicate installation.

Exotic metals

Stainless steel isn't the only type of metal sink. For a distinctive look, consider more exotic metals such as copper, brass, nickel, and even titanium.

Copper has strong antibacterial and antiviral properties, even against *E. coli*, and because the surface oxidizes, slight scratches tend to "heal" themselves, although the patina can change.

High-quality brass or titanium sinks are actually a combination of stainless steel and either brass or titanium. A brass sink offers a warm, rich look, while titanium sinks come in three colors: anthracite, bronze, and gold. Beware of lower-quality brass sinks, which have coatings that can flake over time.

Depending on the material, exotic-metal sink prices range from slightly more than stainless steel for simple configurations of copper to thousands of dollars for high-end titanium or brass.

BOTTOM LINE Pros Durable; hygienic; can offer a unique handmade look. **Cons** Some metals can change slightly in appearance with age; cost can be high.



Thompson Traders Monterosso

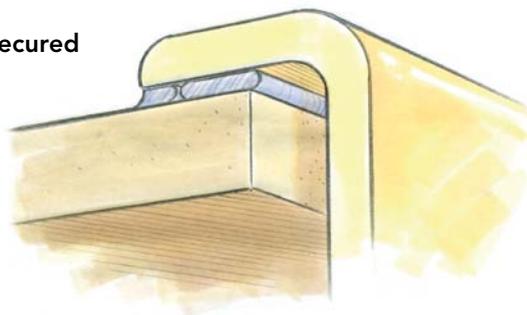
CHOOSE AN INSTALLATION STYLE Typically, sinks are installed either by dropping them into the hole cut in the counter or by mounting them under the counter. Manufacturers typically have specific instructions that need to be followed to the letter, especially in undermount installations.

Drop-in

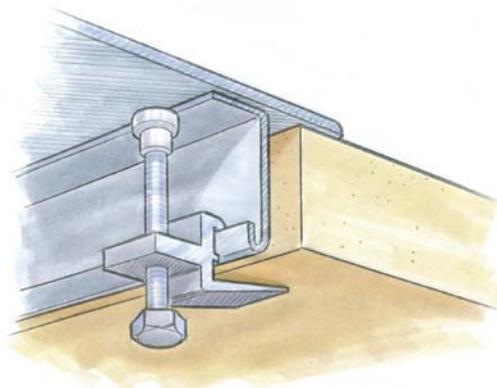
Drop-in sinks rest on top of the counter, making it more difficult to sweep crumbs and spills into the sink, but they are arguably the easiest to install. These sinks are fastened with either screw clamps that integrate with a factory-attached track or, in the case of heavy sinks, a bead of sealant between the countertop and the edge of the sink. A word of caution for screw-clamp installations: Overtightening the fastener will strip it out of the base material, twist off the head, bend the screw, or even break the sink. If it's an in-place installation, be sure to have a good light source when working.



Sealant-secured



Screw clamps

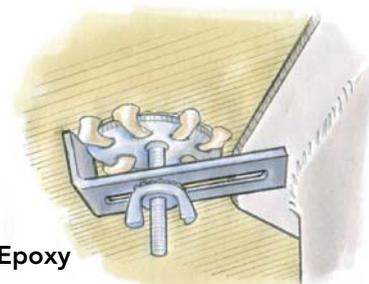


Undermount

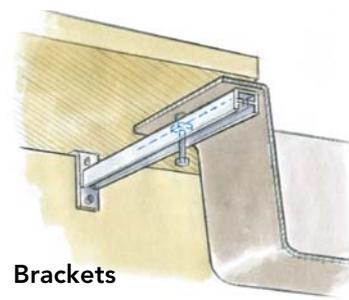
Undermount, or rimless, sinks are gaining popularity, especially when used with granite, synthetic stone, or other materials that show the full-depth beauty of the countertop. However, they are more difficult to install and may require the use of special mounting brackets and tools (or, in the case of farmhouse sinks, often a solid platform). As a result, these sinks are often installed by the countertop fabricator. Don't use undermount sinks with laminate countertops because the slightest imperfection will expose the countertop's engineered-wood core to moisture, which can cause the wood to swell and the laminate to separate.



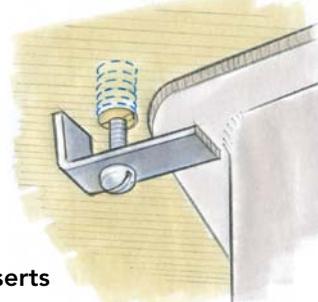
Epoxy



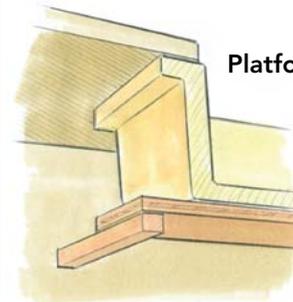
Brackets



Inserts



Platform



3 reveal options

