



Lifestyle

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Get Organized: Clutter gobbling up fridge space? Here's how to unstuff it

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The holidays are the one time of year when we have more food than we know what to do with in our refrigerators.

Thanksgiving is less than three weeks away, and it's time to consider how you will refrigerate all the trimmings. Or is your refrigerator already as stuffed as your turkey soon will be?

Here's a quick and simple plan to help you organize your refrigerator so your turkey doesn't feel claustrophobic:

- Start by eating leftovers that haven't turned into a science project. Toss those that are no longer recognizable. This will begin to free up much-needed space.
- Pretend as if you're moving. Give yourself 20 minutes to remove the contents of your refrigerator. While removing each item -- check the expiration date and toss if it's past its prime. You might be surprised by the dates on items that have been relegated to the back corners or lower door trays.
- With the refrigerator empty, take 20 minutes to wipe down the shelves, drawers, walls and other compartments. Now it will be like move-in day with a sparkling-clean refrigerator as you return the remaining items.
- Before stocking the fridge, take stock of the types of food you store on a regular basis. The food groups might include: dairy, condiments, meats, leftovers, produce, snack items, drinks, etc. Designate a section for each of the groups. Once stocked, let family members know where they can find -- and more importantly -- return items.

Hopefully, after this project, which will take less than an hour, you now have enough space for all of the Thanksgiving trimmings.

To help you keep your refrigerator organized throughout the year, I recommend the following products:

Stay Fresh onion/tomato container -- This cool container stores an onion (and its odor) or a tomato flatly without wasting space. \$6.49 at organize.com

Magnetic digital day counter -- These timers help ease concerns about whether your leftovers are still fit for consumption. You can count up to 24 hours or up to 99 days with a simple one-button operation. The counter adheres to all metal surfaces and is versatile and reusable. Package of two, \$10.99 at organize.com.

Freezer storage baskets -- Keep packages, boxes and bags of frozen foods organized and easy to access with these baskets. They won't scratch the interior of your freezer and are available in two sizes. \$5.99 or \$7.99 at The Container Store

Chore magnets -- OK, so this fun product doesn't help much with organizing the refrigerator, unless of course you use it to delegate the task to someone else! Use these on the fridge door to help keep track of your child's chore list, so you can see what still needs to be done. Package of 40 magnets, \$8.49 at organize.com

Deluxe chrome can holder -- Use this to save space for canned beverages. I like this unit because it has the top shelf, which provides extra storage space. This unit holds 12 cans and slants down, so the next can rolls down into the ready spot. 9 inches tall, 6 1/4 inches wide, 18 1/2 inches long. \$11.99 at organize.com

ButterMate -- This fun kitchen tool lets you store, measure, slice and dispense the required amount of butter. Comes with a conversion chart. You can store this unit neatly in your refrigerator or use it on the table. The adjustable measurement slider slices through butter with a wire blade. \$9.49 at organize.com

Lazy Susan -- This is one of my favorite kitchen products and you can even use it in your refrigerator. One model is 13 inches in diameter, though your refrigerator might accommodate a wider one. I like this one for its raised perimeter that helps keep items in place while turning. A turntable is a perfect tool to keep items from being shoved to the depths of the refrigerator. Use it to store extra condiments that don't fit in the door compartment, leftovers or other items that you want to put your hands on quickly. \$14.99 at organize.com

Erasable food storage labels -- Label leftovers or food in the freezer so they're easily recognizable. A starter kit at \$10.99 comes with a marker, eraser and labels. Refill labels are \$7.99. At The Container Store

Small food keepers -- I like these food keepers because the same-size containers stack securely and neatly to save space. Use them in the fridge or elsewhere. Various sizes. \$1.49 to \$3.99 each at The Container Store

While products can come in handy when organizing small spaces, here are some tips that require no product:

- Establish one day a week when you take a quick scan of the refrigerator and eliminate any leftovers past their prime. In our house, we do this on Wednesday, right before the trash can is taken out for garbage pickup.
- Plan your meals so you can take leftovers to work for lunch to save money.
- Keep a running grocery list close by so that when something is empty or running low, family members know to add it to the list. That way there are no surprises, like no milk for your morning bowl of cereal or that cup of coffee.
- Take a quick inventory before you shop -- so you don't end up with a fourth jar of strawberry jam when there already are three in the refrigerator or pantry.

RESOURCES

organize.com -- online only at ... yep, you got it

The Container Store -- containerstore.com. Or in Bellevue at 700 Bellevue Way N.E. (Lincoln Square)

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