

50 Best Budget Kitchen Decorating Ideas
By Kathleen Wilson

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1. Repaint those cabinets! Unless you have high quality wood cabinets, chances are they could use some rejuvenation, and painted finishes are very hot! There are many techniques you can easily learn to give your kitchen cabinets an expensive designer look. Crackling, faux finishing, and glazing are all quite simple and cost effective. Try the Internet for some guidance; most major paint manufacturers have websites with great instructions! Try www.dutchboy.com or www.fauxlikeapro.com

2. Paint those walls! These days our kitchens are the hub of the home, and we all feel more comfortable in rooms that offer mood and character. If you have wood cabinets, color on the walls will make the wood appear richer, and will emphasize your accessories.

3. Make carved look molding and appliquéés. There are several techniques for creating beautiful moldings and architectural embellishments for very little money. You can either use joint compound and a cake-decorating bag to create beautiful designs on plain wood strips, then prime and paint, or use my “salt dough” method. I use the salt dough recipes that children often use for making Christmas decorations. I cut the dough into simple shapes such as leaves, ropes, or scrolls. Then let dry or bake as the recipe dictates. Now simply use a glue gun to attach to wood strips, prime and paint! This gives you a little more control over the finished piece, and also is a lot cheaper! Hint: If you use this method for appliquéés, paint before you attach to the wall. These are great attached to the front of cabinet doors, or over doorways. See the two recipes I use below.

Salt Dough Recipe

2 cups flour

½ cup salt

Water added by the tablespoon until the desired consistency

1-2 tablespoons salad oil added to help keep it from drying and cracking

Place pieces on a cookie sheet in a 250-degree oven for 1 hour, then check every 15 minutes until hard, but not overly brown.

Cornstarch Recipe (While this recipe is a little more inconvenient because of the air drying, it yields a much finer product, almost like porcelain.)

2 Cups Baking Soda
1-Cup Cornstarch
1 ¼ cups water

Heat in a saucepan until thick, let cool, and then knead out on a board dusted with cornstarch. Cut or work into desired shapes, then let air dry at least 24 hours or more.

4. Use fabric in your kitchen. Years ago, there was a belief that you shouldn't use fabric in a kitchen because of the grease and food splatters, and the difficulty cleaning. Nowadays, most fabrics can be thrown in the washer and dryer, so go ahead and use it! It softens the kitchen, can add romance or charm, and makes it feel like a warm connection to the rest of your house, instead of a cold utilitarian space. Curtains or valances, appliance covers, and table runners all can be easily stitched at home. (Or fused with an iron and hem tape available at your sewing or craft store.) Fabric does not have to be expensive either. Flat twin sheets are always a great value, and can be gotten on sale for as little as 3 dollars. Keep an eye out at garage sales for sheets, quilts, tablecloths, and even clothing that have your home's color schemes.

5. Give yourself stone counters for less than \$40! Ok, ordinarily even \$40 for one project is a little much for me, but this one has such a large impact and is so easy, that it's definitely worth it! The secret? Paint! Get a book from the library, or search the Internet for instructions on the stone faux finish of your choice, (practice on cardboard first!) then follow these steps. For this to be successful, there is one step you cannot skip on. Prime your countertops with a primer specially made for non-porous surfaces!!! Bin or KILZ are both good brands. (I also like to use their water-based variety, check the can carefully!) Now paint your faux finish. Allow to dry thoroughly, 24 hours is best. Now simply give it 4 or 5 coats of water-based polyurethane, let dry, and enjoy years of a beautiful kitchen! Save some of your original paint so if you ever do get a chip, touch up is a breeze. I promise you, visitors to your home will be hard pressed to tell that it isn't a \$5000 counter!

6. If you don't want the hard work that goes into total repainting of your cabinets, consider removing a cupboard door to make a display cabinet. Paint the entire interior of the cabinet a light or bright accent color, and put your prettiest on display. Or have someone good with power tools cut out the center panels of the doors, then shirr fabric over the inside to hide the contents of the cupboard...secure with a staple gun or Velcro tape.

7. Pick up inexpensive plate hangers from the hardware store and hang the saucers from your good china around the backsplash, or as a border. Don't have any china? Visit garage sales and thrift stores this weekend to pick up a bunch of sweet little plates for a song. (No, they don't have to match, or be fancy!)

8. Hang tea towels on the diagonal over your curtain rod for a fresh summer valance, and save some extra to stitch up into potholders and placemats.

9. Make a floor cloth to perk up your tired floors from a piece of remnant vinyl flooring you get at a home improvement center for just a few dollars. Turn the piece over to the backside, and give it a coat or two of good primer, then a coat of any basecoat color. Then use masking tape, stencils, stamps, sponges or freehand painting to impart a design that fits your room. Be sure to seal it with a couple of coats of water-based polyurethane, and it will wipe clean for years! This is a great way to customize your kitchen for little money...lets face it, rugs are expensive, impossible to keep clean in a kitchen, and are usually the same old boring thing. This is also a great way to cover an aging or damaged floor, as you can make the floor cloth to whatever size you need.

10. Save empty bottles and fill with colored water to set on the windowsills, or line up the bottles and fill with one flower each from your garden.

11. Grow plants from seed on your windowsills! Even grass seed has become very vogue. (Don't tell anyone, because I usually shy away from "vogue", but I really like the grass thing!☺)

12. Utilize creative paint techniques to add interest. Using masking tape, create faux tiles, diamonds, even stripes on the wall, then paint in your chosen color scheme. Hint: You can get ¼ inch masking tape in the quilting area of your fabric or crafts store, that is just perfect to represent grout lines for faux wall tile!

13. Use the area above your cabinet to display collectibles. Put them together in smaller groups, but be sure to leave some space between each group of objects for the eye to rest.

14. Use plants abundantly in your kitchen. Build a small shelf across your windowsill, and start plants from seed or cuttings to save money. Plants breather life into a room!

15. Don't leave artwork out of the kitchen! Ok, I wouldn't hang an expensive print above the stove, but some simple frames painted in accent colors with old calendar or catalog photos add a lot of charm.

16. Make sure you have plenty of lighting in the kitchen. This doesn't have to mean expensive or elaborate built in lighting strips...a small tabletop lamp on the counter is high on personality, and practicality! Remake a shade from a flea market find, or learn how to make your own lamp with a lamp making kit from your craft or hardware store!

17. Don't be afraid to mix wood finishes or colors in the kitchen. Some of the most successful and popular designer kitchen combines dark wood with light, or painted cabinets with stained.

18. Also don't be afraid to mix counter materials. Finish the main in one selection, then your island in another. Or tape off a border, and marbleize the border area, and faux granite the interior.
19. If you have a plain tile backsplash, stencil, hand paint, or stamp designs onto random tiles with the new "no fire" ceramic and glass paint found at your craft store. Use the accent colors and elements in your room scheme.
20. Want to do something about that out of date vinyl flooring, but can't afford to replace? You can indeed paint vinyl flooring. The biggest trick is keeping everyone out of the kitchen while it cures! The steps are the same as for painting countertops...you need a good primer specifically made for non-porous surface such as BIN or KILZ, and this is a step you CANNOT skip! Next, paint your floor using ordinary house paint; expensive floor paint is not necessary. Try finding a photo of a floor design in a magazine, and then graph it out on paper first. Use masking tape to add grout lines if you wish. Let dry thoroughly, then seal with a water based polyurethane. For a high traffic floor I recommend 6 coats, and that will give you years of floor life!
21. Consider making cabinet pulls out of unusual materials. Antique silverware can be drilled and attached with screws and nuts, (ask your local home improvement center for help with the appropriate hardware) or how about sturdy twigs for a rustic theme? You can also buy inexpensive plain unfinished wooden knobs very cheaply, then use metallic craft paint to give them a more upscale feel.
22. Make a pot rack, and add character to your kitchen with the practical pots and pans you already own! Pot racks can be made from a variety of items with a little chain, some s-hooks, and some wall anchors. (For the ceiling of course!) How about an old wine rack, or even a sturdy piece of latticework?
23. Bring flowers into the kitchen. Flowers shouldn't be relegated to the more formal rooms of the house, bring them in where you will see them and enjoy them most! Even a bunch of roadside daisies will add romance to your kitchen.
24. Love those hand painted French signs you see hanging in expensive kitchens, like "Café" or "Maison de Wilson"? Paint your own! A rough piece of lumber, some craft paint, and a little sanding to add age are all it takes! You can use a hot glue gun to add picture hangers to the backside.
25. Love that pickled cabinet finish? It's easy to do over your present cabinets. Use TSP to make sure your cabinets are absolutely clean, then lightly sand. Now using thinned down white house paint, brush over the surface of the cabinet. Work on small area at a time. Wait a few minutes, and then wipe down with a cloth. Repeat the process until you get the level of color you desire! You may wish to seal with polyurethane, or a paste wax.

26. Use strings of white holiday lights under kitchen cabinets for a quick and cheap lighting alternative. Simply use a staple gun or nail in brads to attach to the bottom of the cabinets. Be careful never to staple the wiring, and if you do, don't use that string of lights!
27. I added extra storage space and an eating area by adding a simple plywood box with a hinged lid to my kitchen. Painted to match the kitchen theme, it's a great breakfast table for my little ones, and doubles as storage for my kitchen items used less often, such as the Thanksgiving platter or the Santa cookie plates. (Can you say, breadmaker?) You can have the home improvement center cut the wood to size for you for a small fee, and then it's just a matter of some screws and hinges! Real simple, honest!
28. Add casters to a small dresser as an instant island for your kitchen! Just make sure you buy the right size casters for the weight of your piece.
29. Buy inexpensive clear glass jars at your local discount store, and display your food staples. Pasta, beans, even cereal can add interesting color and texture to the room.
30. Add fringe or homemade tassels to your kitchen curtains to add elegance and romance!
31. You can find wire basket produce hangers at many dollar or discount stores! Display your produce, and create practical storage that also allows air circulation, and longer life for your produce! Produce brings life into a room, just like flowers or other living things.
32. Use hanging plants to visually separate the kitchen from other rooms in an open floor plan house. It won't make you feel closed in, but will organize your design.
33. Use small boxes as lifts to help organize your cupboards by bringing the items in back into view. Store kitchen items near where you will use them most for the best efficiency.
34. Use the new stained glass paints to create a light show in your kitchen! Available at any craft store, you can either create whole window effects, or sun catchers to hang in the window. Check out www.plaidonline.com for more info.
35. If you are a renter but want to add some style, cut motifs out of contact paper to adhere to cabinet doors or walls. You can use stencils to trace a design onto the backing paper, or simply draw freehand. It is easily removable when it's time to leave, with no big cash investment.
36. Bring a comfortable chair into a corner of your kitchen to encourage visitors while the cooking and cleaning is going on. Some of the most memorable family moments happen in the kitchen!

37. Store your cookbooks on the kitchen counter...not only are they right where you need them; books add a lot of warmth and hominess to a room.

38. Use no fire glass paints and dollar store clear glass plates to create one of a kind décor for your kitchen walls. Try decoupage a motif from wallpaper or gift wrap onto the back of the plate with white glue, let dry, then sponge paint in your kitchen colors over the back of it. Pick a color that contrasts nicely with the motif for best results. Metallic gold makes an elegant statement.

39. If you don't need your entire cupboard space, remove the cupboard door; paint the interior a contrasting color, then display a beautiful piece of pottery or artwork. Instantly adds an upscale feel.

40. Frame your kid's artwork, and hang it in your kitchen! Give each child their own frame, (remember garage sales and thrift stores!) and allow them to update their artwork weekly.

41. Make a mosaic backsplash. With just a few broken tiles, some silicone adhesive, and some grout, you can design your own mosaic backsplash that will be a one of a kind! You can either graph a design on paper, or do a random design. I suggest choosing earth-toned tiles, as they will integrate much easier if you change your style or sell your house. Try interspersing the mosaic with a few purchased, more intricate tiles. Doing a mosaic makes having to worry about cutting ceramic tiles unnecessary!

42. Use a small square piece of a kitchen sponge to sponge a checkerboard pattern with paint. Outline cupboard doors, create a wall border, or add edging to the curtain hem. This method uses very little paint!

43. Cut "tiles" or "bricks" from handmade paper or brown paper bags, and apply to the wall with wallpaper paste. Remember, the background color will be the color of your "grout". Try tearing the edges of the paper first for a pleasant handmade look.

44. If your cabinets are beyond painting, but you can't afford to replace them, sew gathered skirts from flat sheet material and attach with Velcro strips to the bottom cabinets. Then remove the doors from the top cabinets, and replace each door with a fabric panel, using either Velcro, or cup hooks and ribbon loops.

45. Inexpensive wire shelving units can be found at your local discount center and used as a bakers rack. Simply add a wooden cutting board to the top shelf as a cutting surface.

46. Use large ceramic floor tiles as trivets. They come in an amazing variety of stone look designs, and many cost less than \$2.

47. If you have a blank wall in your kitchen, add a faux fireplace! Paint tiles onto the wall, paint the firebox black, and add an inexpensive wooden shelf as a mantel. Plenty of candles and accessories, and you've created an illusion that will make your kitchen stand out!

48. This is an old one, but display your fruit in a bowl on the counter. Color, texture, and it encourages healthy snacking!

49. Got a more contemporary kitchen? Save and frame colorful labels from soup cans, cereal boxes, and wrappers. The trick is to pick eye-catching designs, and group them together to make them look deliberate.

50. Above all, invoke your family into the place where you spend the most time. I've heard some designers say you should keep your refrigerator clear to prevent clutter, NO MAGNETS! But honestly, what would my kitchen be without my kids drawings stuck all over the door? It wouldn't be the place I want to spend most of my time. I even have a couple of framed photos of my kids, right on the kitchen counter! So make your kitchen YOUR home, and have fun doing it!

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national column and hundreds more great ideas on decorating
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