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The Small Kitchen Upgrade Plan

Make room for the appliances you'll use and decide what's worth buying first.

A BUDGET-FRIENDLY BUYING GUIDE

Compare compact appliances, plan a spending cap, and take two printable worksheets shopping.

COUNTER MEASUREMENTS

BUY FIRST / BUY LATER CHECKLIST

Give each appliance a job

Start with one task you do often and one spot you can spare. That gives you a way to judge every appliance you're considering.

1. Notice what slows you down

For a week, jot down repeated kitchen tasks. Look for a specific frustration, such as hauling a heavy blender out for one smoothie or moving the toaster every time you prep dinner.

2. Clear one usable work area

Move things that rarely get used. Pick one section to leave open for chopping, mixing, or setting down groceries. Measure the appliance space that remains.

3. Decide where it will live

An appliance you use most mornings may earn a spot on the counter. For occasional use, measure a shelf and try reaching it with an object of similar weight.

4. Shop for the job you wrote down

Use pages 3–5 to check fit, compare appliances, and set a spending cap. Work through the example on page 6, then print pages 7–8 for your own plan.

A good first upgrade is easy to name

"I want to make a single breakfast smoothie without hauling out a large pitcher." That points to a much clearer shortlist than "I need a better blender."

Check the working space

A product’s listing dimensions tell you how big it is. Measure how much room you’ll need to use it, clean it, and put it away.

Width and depth

Measure the clear width between walls or nearby items. Measure usable depth from the backsplash to the front edge, and check whether the full base fits. Include any rear space the cord and plug occupy.

Height during use

Measure from the counter to the cabinet above. Check the appliance with the lid open, the mixer head raised, or the pitcher lifted off the base. Include room for your hand.

The cord and cleanup route

Note outlet location and the cord path. Check where you’ll wipe the appliance and how you’ll carry removable parts to the sink. For an ice maker, check how you fill and drain the specific model.

Model-specific clearances

Read the manual for the exact model you’re shopping. Check the required clearances and placement instructions, particularly if you plan to use the appliance under upper cabinets.

Try a paper footprint

Cut a paper rectangle to the model’s listed width and depth. Set it where the appliance would sit and try prepping a meal alongside it.

Pick the tool for your routine

Use your most frequent task to choose a category. Then compare two models by fit, setup, and cleanup.

Slim toaster • Daily toast

Compare slot length and width against the bread you buy. Look at the crumb tray’s removal direction, where the controls sit, and how the toaster fits on the counter during use.

Compact blender • Single servings

Check cup capacity against your usual recipe. If you blend frozen ingredients, verify that the model supports them. See which pieces need washing after each use.

Hand or stand mixer • Baking

Check that the mixer handles your usual recipes and batch sizes. For a stand mixer, measure with the head raised or bowl removed. For a hand mixer, plan a drawer spot for the body and beaters.

Nugget ice maker • Frequent ice use

Make sure there’s a convenient route for filling, draining, and cleaning. Check what the manual says about upkeep, and account for any supplies the model needs.

Write down one deal-breaker per model

A pitcher that can’t lift clear of a cabinet or a crumb tray that’s blocked by a wall can settle a close decision quickly.

Budget for the whole setup

Choose a total you’re comfortable spending. Use it to decide how much can go toward the appliance and what can wait.

Start with the total at checkout

Compare the appliance price, estimated tax, and shipping. Add only the accessories you’ll actually need to do the task, such as a compatible cup in the right size.

Keep a little room in the budget

For example, set a $120 cap. Reserve $15 for tax and shipping, $10 for a needed accessory, and $10 as a buffer. That leaves up to $85 for the appliance itself.

Compare two candidates on the same terms

Write down each model’s total, the task it solves, and the trade-off you would live with. Check what comes in the box, how returns work, and whether replacement parts are available.

Set a trigger for buying later

Tie your next purchase to a real need. For example, reconsider a stand mixer after tracking how often you bake batches that are difficult to finish with your hand mixer.

Give the spending cap a job

If neither candidate fits your space and budget, keep your measurements and check again when you’re ready to shop.

WORKED EXAMPLE

One counter, two choices

A household makes smoothies four mornings a week and mixes batter twice a month. Their hand mixer still handles the recipes they make.

Measure	They have 12 in. of clear width, 15 in. of usable depth, and 17 in. under the cabinet.
Compare	A sample blender has an 8 × 9 in. base and stands 15 in. tall. At that spot, lifting off the cup takes 19 in. of height.
Test a second spot	An open stretch of counter has enough room to lift off the cup. They mark the base with paper and make sure their main prep area stays clear.
Check the budget	Their illustrative $120 cap covers a $78 blender, a $12 extra cup they plan to use, $12 in estimated tax and shipping, and an $18 buffer.
Choose	They prioritize the blender after checking the manual for placement and clearances. The stand mixer stays on the buy-later list.

The dimensions and prices above are illustrative. Use the exact model’s manual and your own checkout estimate on the next two pages.

Measure your counter

Fill in one sheet per appliance spot. Use the same units for every measurement and leave room for the appliance to open or come apart.

Appliance or task _____

Location _____

MEASUREMENT	AVAILABLE SPACE	MODEL NEEDS
Clear width		
Usable depth		
Height in use		
Space for plug and cord		
Manual’s clearance requirements		
Storage shelf or drawer space		

- [ ] I checked the measurement with moving parts open or removed.
- [ ] I confirmed the model’s placement instructions and tried the footprint.

Notes _____

Buy first, buy later

Use this page at checkout. Keep your second choice and its purchase trigger handy for your next kitchen upgrade.

BUY FIRST

Task I want to make easier _____

Model name and number _____

My spending cap _____

Total with tax, shipping, and essentials _____

- [ ] It fits where I'll use and store it.
- [ ] I know what's included and what I'll need to buy separately.
- [ ] I've checked cleanup, upkeep, and the return window.
- [ ] The total fits my spending cap.

BUY LATER

Appliance or accessory _____

What would make it worth buying? _____

When I'll review it _____

After a week of use, check whether the upgrade made the task easier. Use what you learned to decide what comes next.