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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Innovative Trends in the Kitchen

The pandemic has majorly impacted the way we use our homes, and the kitchen is no exception. Here are some of the top kitchen trends that have been created or accelerated by COVID-19.

- **Walk-in pantries** – The pandemic caused many people to stock up on nonperishable food items, leading to an increased demand for spacious walk-in pantries.
- **Touchless faucets** – Innovations in faucet technology include touchless features as well as voice activation that allows users to specify the amount of water they need.
- **Push-open cabinetry** – Cabinets without handles and drawers without pulls offer an easy-to-clean alternative to traditional kitchen hardware.
- **More interior walls** – After working from home, many people are moving away from open concept kitchens in favor of separate, well-defined spaces to provide privacy and quiet places to work.
- **Antimicrobial surfaces** – Since 2019, hardwood flooring has declined while floor coverings such as vinyl, ceramic and porcelain have risen in popularity as homeowners look for surfaces that are easy to clean and sterilize.
- **Outdoor access** – Seeking a connection to nature, many people have added French or sliding glass doors to their kitchens in order gain more natural light and provide easy access to the backyard.

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Ways To Enhance Your Outdoor Space

If you're looking forward to spending more time in your backyard this summer, you may need to tackle a few improvement projects to spruce up your space. Consider the following changes to help you make the most of the time you spend outside.

Increase shade. Creating some shade in your outdoor space can make it more inviting during hot summer months. Here are several ideas.

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- Install a pergola, gazebo, marquee awning, or canopy.
- Hang patio curtains on shade structures.
- Invest in a cantilever patio umbrella.
- Plant trees in strategic places throughout your yard.

Add a fire pit. Before purchasing a fire pit, consider your space and how your family plans to use it. If you're dreaming of roasting marshmallows over an open flame, you may want to build a large wood-burning fire pit. On the other hand, if you want quick and convenient access without the campfire smell, a natural gas fire pit could make a sleek, modern addition to your entertaining area.

Light things up. A great way to enhance your outdoor living space is by adding lights. String lights and solar-powered path lights are simple and inexpensive additions that can make your patio more welcoming after dark.

Make maintenance easy. Consider adding stepping stones, concrete pavers or a brick patio to decrease the size of your lawn. Use a sprinkler system to minimize evaporation and keep your grass and flower beds healthy.

Create an outdoor cooking space. If you enjoy hosting friends and family members on your deck or patio, consider investing in an outdoor kitchen. Choose the features you'd use the most, such as a grill, counter space, storage for grilling tools and outdoor dishes, and possibly a sink.

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Transform the Area Under Your Stairs

Maximize the empty space underneath a staircase with these creative ideas from *CountryLiving.com*.

Extra storage: Add a freestanding cabinet to use as a linen closet, or install built-in shelves for extra pantry items. This area can also be turned into a mini mudroom with a bench and a few coat hooks.

Play area: Consider transforming the empty space into a fun place for the kids or grandkids in your life. Add cushions and baskets of toys, or convert it into an indoor playhouse.

Office nook: If there's enough room for a desk, chair and file cabinet, you can turn the space into a small office. For the book lovers in your household, colorful built-in shelves can create a cozy library.

Pet retreat: Giving your furry friends their own space is a great way to keep them calm in stressful situations – especially when entertaining guests. Try adding a large crate or building a custom doghouse under your stairs.

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Things To Know About Dust

If you're looking for motivation to dust the surfaces in your home, consider these facts.

1. **Dust isn't just dirt.** Dust is made up of skin cells, dust mites, soil, pet dander, textile fibers, pollen, and more.
2. **Dust particles like to linger.** Dust can hang in the air for up to five days, which is one reason why it accumulates so quickly after you've cleaned.
3. **Dust travels far and wide.** Each year, five billion tons of dust travel through the atmosphere, impacting everything from air temperatures to ground cooling and rainfall levels.

Cut down on dust with these tips.

- Use a damp microfiber cloth to trap dust on hard surfaces.
- Brush your pets outside, and change your HVAC filters frequently.
- Try a lint roller to remove dust from lampshades.
- To remove more dirt from shoes, place doormats on both the insides and outsides of the entrances to your home.

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Strawberry Cheesecake French Toast

Ingredients

1 (16 oz.) tub cream cheese, softened
1 cup sugar
11 large eggs, divided
2 tsp. lemon juice
1 cup whole milk
½ cup heavy cream
5 Tbsp. maple syrup
2 tsp. vanilla
2 tsp. cinnamon
20 (1 inch) slices French bread
2 cups sliced strawberries

Directions

Grease a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Using an electric mixer, beat cream cheese until light and fluffy. Add in sugar, then mix in 1 egg and lemon juice. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, whisk together 10 eggs, milk, cream, syrup, vanilla, and cinnamon until well combined. Layer 10 bread slices in baking dish. Spread half of cream cheese mixture over bread, then add half of strawberries. Repeat layers. Pour egg mixture over the top. Cover with aluminum foil and chill overnight.

Remove from fridge while oven preheats to 350° F. Keep covered and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake for an additional 30 minutes or until set.

Serves 8-10



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