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Survival of the prepared

Edy Keeler/For The New Mexican

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A Berlin kitchen: Be a typical European and plan to shop daily for your evening meals

What to do before you remodel your kitchen? A kitchen remodel is an interior-design project that will turn your entire household upside down for weeks, or maybe months. Proper planning can help shorten the time frame and keep everything on track, but you still have to deal with this temporary life-altering reality: You will have no kitchen! It is camping with all the comforts of home — except getting homemade meals easily, or in whatever way you are accustomed to preparing them.

How do you keep from losing your mind? Prepare as if you're going on an extended camping or glamping trip! Here are our favorite pre-demolition tips:

Set boundaries with your contractor. Have a special meeting with your contractor just to discuss mutual expectations up front and, just as important, to find out what they really need and expect from you. For example, you want a good crew that will tidy up the job site at the end of every day and haul away trash. You need your own space. So designate at least one room that is just for you and your family. It should be off-limits for workers.

Any experienced remodeler will already know to use plastic sheeting, floor to ceiling, to contain the dust and debris in the work area. There are ingenious methods to adhere the plastic, and it can come with large-scale zippers that accommodate entry and exit when need be. Together you can set rules about which areas they can't enter.

Your builder and vendors will want and need to store materials and appliances in nearby rooms, unless your garage is easily accessible, so make sure you work together so everyone knows and accepts these areas. Your builder will also want some assurance that your children will be kept out of danger zones.

Declutter and pack up your kitchen. Packing your kitchen carefully makes moving into your new kitchen much easier. Keep a donation box handy. Don't fill your beautiful new kitchen with things you never use — I do not believe every item has to spark joy (the Kondo test) but it should be something you really like and use.

While you pack, set aside a box of basic items to set up a temporary kitchen:

- Coffee and tea supplies, with cups and favorite brewing appliances
- Cutting board and knives
- Platter, serving bowls, and utensils
- Large tray to carry meals to the table, wherever you decide it will be
- Just enough plates, bowls and silverware for each of you — you will not be entertaining
- Dishwashing supplies, and include a dish tub
- Salt, pepper, a few favorite spices

- Foil, storage containers, ziplock bags
- Can opener, bottle opener, wine opener
- Grilling utensils
- Good-size trash container and trash bags

Create a temporary kitchen. While it's tempting to eat out every day, it's hard on your budget and waistline, and eventually it's even tiring for kids. We recommend it during the busy work week, just two or three times. For real life, you'll need a large enough spot to make coffee or tea, fix school lunches, and cook simple meals.

Try to locate your temporary kitchen near a sink for cleanup. If you have a wet bar or a morning kitchen in a bedroom, you're in luck. But a laundry room or guest-bathroom sink will do if there's a spot nearby to set up your mini-kitchen. And consider the season: late spring, summer, and into early fall are better times for this remodel, as you can set up in or near an outdoor area.

Portable conference tables are sturdy and narrow, so they're perfect for a temporary kitchen. It's amazing what you can cook with a microwave over, instant pot, hot plate, and coffee maker. When you're tired of microwaved meals, use your grill as a stove and an oven with indirect grilling. You can make and bake wonderful pizzas on a grill. Find simple directions at PioneerWoman.com.

If you can't keep your old refrigerator handy, and are using a mini-fridge, you may need to shop almost every day. To maintain your sanity, remind yourself that tiny kitchens are the norm for most of the world, and shopping every day like a European is very chic! And unlike small towns in Italy that have no supermarket, you won't have to go to the greengrocer, the bakery and the butcher shop. AND you have a major reward at the end of the journey.

The best sanity-saving tip: take your vacation during your kitchen remodel. Give yourself a break from the chaos by taking off for a short, or long, vacation, a rewarding business trip, or a visit, maybe extended, to family. During stages like flooring installation, your contractor might even ask you to leave for a few days. Remodeling creates exposed wires and holes in the floor that can be dangerous if you have children.

A few days away from the noise and mess will work wonders for your sanity. Toward the end of the experience is a great time: you're tired of the process, and you can come back to a big reveal—your new culinary paradise.

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