

How to Organize Your Kitchen

189 Great Kitchen Organization Tips and Ideas

By Judith Brown

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1. General Kitchen Organization Ideas

If your kitchen is too small to accommodate a table and chairs permanently, install a pull-out extension table or workspace that slides back into a "drawer." Or, make a flip-up counter and eating area that folds back down when not in use.

To make the most of available space when storing tapered glassware, position every other glass upside down. If your dishpan leaks, don't throw it away.

Use it as an under-the-sink storage bin for waxes, brushes, and soaps. It will slide in and out like a drawer.

If you keep your brooms, mops, and buckets hanging on hooks inside the broom closet they won't fall every time you open the door.

You can cut counter clutter with stackable plastic canisters or a 4-in-1 turntable canister.

Purchase food storage containers that do several jobs. Freezer-to-oven casserole dishes are more useful than freezer containers that store casseroles adequately but can't be used in the oven.

A wall-hung canvas "apron" with lots of pockets makes a decorative holder for all sorts of kitchen gadgets and utensils.

If you hang your sharp knives inside or on the side of a high cabinet, you'll save drawer space and keep these utensils out of the children's reach.

Use the plastic lids that come with some tins as separators when you freeze hamburger patties.

If you don't have cabinet space for your pots and pans, put a small wooden ladder-painted to match your kitchen-in a corner and place the pots and pans on the steps.

To economize on drawer space, arrange wooden spoons and other utensils bouquet-style in a handsome pitcher, canister, or wooden bucket near the range or on the counter.

If you lack drawer space for kitchen linens and towels, store them in pretty baskets on the counter.

Floor tiles make perfect linings for pantry shelves. They last longer than self-adhesive paper and are easier to fit in place.

Staple plastic berry baskets to the pantry wall or the inside of a cabinet door to hold small packages of sauce mixes, seasonings, and cold drink mixes.

If your kitchen and dining room area are combined and you dislike looking at the pots and pans while you eat, install a ceiling-hung Venetian blind to separate the two areas.

Organize your kitchen so that the items you use every day are within easy reach.

Since pots, pans, and casseroles can be heavy, store them at lower levels to avoid having to reach up for them.

Hanging mugs on cup hooks underneath your cabinets saves shelf space.

To save space in the kitchen, hang pots, pans, and other items from the ceiling. Use hooks meant for hanging swag lamps and screw them directly into the joists.

Toss a few extra plastic clothes pins into your kitchen drawer. Use them to seal packages of partially used foods such as pretzels, chips, noodles, or rice.

Save screw-top glass containers for storing dry goods in the pantry.

Make a knife holder out of your empty thread spools. Insert screws in the spool holes and attach them to a cabinet door. Place the spools in a row, one butted right next to the other. The blades will fit in the gaps between the spools while the handles rest on the spools.

If you store your sharp knives in drawers, keep the knives in a holder to prevent the blades from getting dull.

If you've nowhere to hang a memo board for your notes, paint part of your kitchen door with three coats of blackboard paint.

A phone center with a writing surface can be installed between two wall studs in your kitchen.

Cut the wall between the two studs and build the center to fit the space.

A~ large pair of tweezers can help you get olives and pickles out of narrow jars; tweezers are also useful for placing garnishes on food without touching the food with your hands, or for removing bones from fish fillets.

Keep an aloe growing in your kitchen. The gel squeezed from a leaf can soothe insect bites, prickly heat, or sunburn.

Washing your ice cube trays occasionally in hot soapy water will keep the cubes from sticking; they'll pop out much more easily.

Rubber-coated plate rack makes a great cookbook holder.

Create your own kitchen sink splash back by cutting a piece of clear plexi-glass to size. Drill two small holes in it and nail it up on the wall.

Plastic or wire baskets on casters provide excellent, easy-to-maneuver storage for unrefrigerated vegetables or loose cooking utensils.

To keep recipes clipped from newspapers and magazines so they'll be readily available, fold them into an envelope fastened to an inside cover of a cookbook.

When you find a recipe that's an improvement over one featured in your cookbook, tape a copy of it right over the recipe in the book. The next time you need it, you'll be able to locate it easily by referring to the book's own index.

If you store cast iron pots and pans with their lids inverted or slightly ajar, there will be enough air circulation to discourage rust formation.

If you store your dishes in open dish racks instead of in cabinets, position the racks over the sink. That way you can wash the dishes, put them in place, and they'll drip-dry into the sink.

Napkins, paper towels, or cloth protectors placed between pieces of fine china when stacking will help prevent scratching.

Most plastic food containers can be recycled for storing or freezing food.

Mesh bags, wire baskets, and even old nylon stockings make good storage containers for potatoes and onions because they allow the necessary air circulation.

Even when soap bars wear down, they're still useful. Slit a sponge to make a pocket to hold the slivers, wet and squeeze the sponge for foamy suds. Or fill a sock with soap slivers and use it the same way.

To remold leftover soap slivers into bars of soap, place them in a small saucepan, cover them with water, and heat the water to the boiling point.

Lower the heat to simmer, and stir the mixture to melt the soap pieces. When the mixture has the consistency of thick, smooth syrup, remove the pan from the heat. Pour its contents into lightly

oiled small containers, such as jar caps or plastic soap dishes. Let the mixture stand for at least three days until hard before tapping the mixture out of the molds.

Thin, leftover soap bars can be tossed into a blender with water and transformed into creamy,

liquid soap. Pour this substance into empty squeeze bottles, and keep one at each sink.

A bar of soap will stay high and dry in a soap dish if it rests on a small sponge.

To prevent cracking, wait to stack and store dinnerware until it's cool.

You can mend a crack in a china cup with milk. Just immerse the cup in a pan of milk, simmer for three-quarters of an hour, and then wash and dry the cup. The protein in the milk is what works the miracle.

Modeling clay can be shaped to support pieces of broken cups, glasses, or other objects while they are being glued back together.

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2. Kitchen Cleanup

Out of liquid dishwashing detergent? Substitute any mild shampoo.

To make an all-purpose soft soap, grate or shave 2 cups of hard bar soap into a large pot, or measure 2. cups of powdered soap into the pot.

Add 1 gallon of water and heat the mixture over medium heat to boiling point, stirring constantly to dissolve the soap. Then lower the heat and let the mixture simmer for 10 minutes, stirring it from time to time. Remove the pot from the heat and let the soap cool partially before pouring it into a clean container and covering tightly. You now have a gallon of soft soap.

If you're using an inexpensive dishwashing detergent but find that it leaves spots on the dishes, simply put a few tablespoons of vinegar in the rinse water.

It's usually possible to remove burned-on foods from a pan by coating the burned-on food generously with baking soda barely moistened with water. Leave the paste on overnight and then wash the pan as usual.

Another way of removing burned-on foods from a pan is to fill the pan with water, drop in one or two fabric softener sheets, and let the water stand for an hour or so. The food crust will lift right off.

To rid a teakettle of lime deposits, fill it with a mix of half water and half vinegar and boil the mixture. Let it stand overnight, and then pour the cooled-off liquid and the lime-down the drain.

Keep a jar of hot, soapy water on the sink when you're cooking and slip silverware into it as you finish using it. Rinse quickly, and the utensils will be clean again.

Always scrape food particles from your dishes before loading the dishes into the dishwasher.

Use the correct cleaning detergents in your dishwasher. Soap suds can damage the equipment, and soap leaves a film on silverware and glasses.

Before you put plastic dishes in the dishwasher, be sure they are labeled dishwasher-safe.

If you take off your rings, watch, or bracelet while washing dishes, fasten a large cup hook near the kitchen sink and hang these valuables on it.

Position the hook so that there's no chance of a small ring slipping out of your hands and down an open drain.

Use a crumpled sheet of newspaper to soak up excess grease from a pan before cleaning the pan in the regular manner.

Try removing dark stains from an aluminum pan by filling the pan with water containing 1 tablespoon of cream of tartar per quart of water and boiling the mixture. White vinegar added to water and boiled works equally well.

To remove discolorations from an aluminum pot, cook tomatoes or applesauce in it; the acid in the food will brighten up the metal.

A cast iron skillet won't rust if you wash and dry it and then-while it is still warm-rub it with a little cooking oil.

You can remove charred food spots from the interior of a cast iron utensil by sprinkling salt on the spots, adding enough vinegar to cover, and boiling the mixture.

Moisture causes cast iron to deteriorate, so after washing and towel drying a cast iron skillet, put it in a warm oven to complete the drying process. It's also a good idea to place paper towels between cast iron pans when you stack them so that moisture can't get trapped between them.

The easiest way to clean the outside of a cast iron skillet is with oven cleaner. Spray it on, let it stand for an hour, and wipe it off with a solution of water and vinegar.

If your glass coffee percolator looks dull, make it sparkle again by boiling vinegar in it.

To remove tarnish from a copper pot, rub the pot with ketchup.

Copper pans also can be cleaned with sour milk. Pour some in a flat dish and soak the copper bottom for an hour. Then wash as usual.

To remove stains from cookware with a nonstick finish, mix 2 tablespoons of baking soda with 1 cup of water and 1/2 cup of liquid bleach. Boil the solution in the pan for several minutes until the stains vanish. After washing the pan with soap and water, wipe the inner surface with cooking oil to preseason it.

To remove rust stains from tinned kitchen ware, simply rub with a peeled potato dipped in a mild abrasive powder and then rinse.

Vinegar is a quick, inexpensive cleaning agent for discolored copper cookware: Apply a paste consisting of 1 tablespoon of salt, 1 tablespoon of white vinegar, and 1 tablespoon of flour.

Because vinegar is acid, wash the skillet in hot, soapy water, then rinse it. Finish off the job with a vigorous buffing to restore a shine. You can achieve the same results with a paste made of 2 tablespoons of vinegar and 1 tablespoon of salt.

To protect your wok from rust when not in use, coat it lightly with cooking oil before storing it.

Stubborn food spots on glassware will dissolve if rubbed with baking soda.

Greasy glassware will come sparkling clean if washed in an ammonia solution.

If there are stubborn lime and water spots on your glassware, try polishing the spots away with a soft chamois cloth.

It is best to wash milk glass and wooden items by hand; if washed in the dishwasher, milk glass will yellow and wooden items will crack and split.

Here's an easy way to remove the cloudiness from your fine crystal: Fill the glasses with ordinary water and drop a denture tablet in each. Wait until the tablets dissolve and then rinse the glasses; the film will be gone.

To prevent cracking, slip delicate stemware into the wash water edgewise-not bottom first.

For real sparkle add a little vinegar to the warm rinse water.

To dry delicate stemware, stand it upside down on a soft towel, or polish it gently with a soft, lint-free cloth.

Use a soft brush to remove dirt from crevices in glassware.

You can clean a stained decanter by filling it with water, adding a cup of ammonia or vinegar, and letting it stand overnight. This doesn't work to your satisfaction, use 2 packs of powdered denture cleaner dissolved in water.

A good way to clean a glass decanter is to cut a potato into small pieces, drop the pieces into the decanter, add warm water, and shake until the decanter's inside surfaces are spotless. Throw out the potato pieces, and then rinse the decanter with clean water.

A vase with a narrow neck appears to be hard to clean, but you can freshen it by dampening the inside with water, sprinkling in some toilet bowl cleaner, and waiting 10 minutes before rinsing thoroughly. Or fill the vase with hot water, add rice and 2 teaspoons of vinegar, and shake vigorously.

You can retard silver tarnishing by placing a piece of alum in the silverware drawer. When silver eventually does tarnish, apply silver polish with a sponge rather than a cloth; a sponge squeezes into crevices a cloth can't reach. Wash silverware by hand rather than in the dishwasher; then buff dry to bring up the shine and prevent water spots. The same method should be used for brass and pewter articles.

Using sterling silver flatware regularly slows the tarnishing process and gives the pieces a beautiful patina.

If you do wash sterling silver in the dishwasher, separate it from stainless steel. Contact between the two produces an electrolytic action that pits the stainless steel.

Because contact with rubber darkens silver, wear cloth instead of rubber gloves when cleaning it. Also, never fasten pieces of silverware together with rubber bands.

Even the slightest dampness causes silver to tarnish, so after you've washed or polished sterling silver it's a good idea to let it air dry for a few hours before putting it away.

Remove stains from crystal glassware by rubbing with a cut lemon or washing in a water and vinegar solution.

When washing delicate objects in the sink, guard against breakage by padding the sink bottom with a towel; wrap another towel, held in place with a rubber band, around the faucet.

You can keep stainless steel shiny by rubbing it with a lemon peel or a cloth dampened with rubbing alcohol, and then washing it as usual.

When black spots appear on carbon steel knives, you can remove them with an old wine bottle cork. Sprinkle cleanser on the side of the blade, wet the cork, and scrub the blade with the flat end of the cork. Clean the other side the same way. If you want carving knives to remain sharp, wash them in cool water.

To retard tarnish on polished brass, rub it with a cloth moistened with olive oil. When it eventually tarnishes, clean it by rubbing with a lemon wedge dipped in salt. Rinse with water and dry with a soft cloth.

You can minimize scratching when you polish pewter if you rub it with cabbage leaves or very fine steel wool. Then rinse with water and dry with a soft cloth.

You'll make defrosting the refrigerator easier if you rub the inside of the freezer section with shortening. As an alternative, spray it with a commercial coating that prevents food from sticking to pans. Either way, ice will slide right off when you defrost.

Do you defrost your refrigerator by letting water drip into a tray beneath the freezer compartment? You can avoid spilling the water on the way to the sink if you leave the tray in position, let its contents refreeze, and then drop the frozen chunk in the sink to melt.

A frost-free refrigerator should be cleaned thoroughly every 4 to 6 months; a manual-defrost refrigerator should be cleaned when frost is 1/2 inch thick.

You can speed up the task of defrosting a manual-defrost refrigerator by placing shallow pans of hot water on the shelves.

Protect your wall behind your stove from grease splatters. Install a washable vinyl shade.

Position it upside down so that the roller is hidden by the stove. When cooking, pull the shade up and fasten it to a hook several feet above the stove.

When finished, roll the shade down out of sight.

Occasionally remove the burners from a gas stove and wash them thoroughly. Clean the holes with a fine wire cleaner or a pipe cleaner, then quickly dry the just-washed burners in a warm oven. (Don't try to clean a gas burner's holes with a toothpick; it may break off and clog a hole.)

To clean the chrome rings on an electric range, put them in a plastic bag with enough ammonia to cover them. Seal the bag and set it aside for half a day. When you remove the rings and rinse them off, they'll be spotless.

Your toaster will gleam if you rub it with a soft cloth dampened with club soda.

Let the blender scrub itself clean. Fill it less than halfway with hot water, add a few drops of dishwashing liquid, and run for 10 seconds. Rinse and dry.

A cheap, effective way to clean a soiled oven is with ordinary household ammonia. Pour 1 cup of ammonia in a glass or ceramic bowl, place it in the oven, and allow it to sit in the closed oven overnight. Next morning, pour the ammonia into a pail of warm water and use this solution to sponge out loosened soil. The fumes are strong at first, but they soon dissipate.

After you've cleaned an oven, bake a few orange peels in it at 350°F to dispel cleaning odors. If your automatic dishwasher leaves a film on your dishes, clean it periodically by setting a bowl of white vinegar-about 2 cups-in the bottom rack, and running a wash-rinse cycle. If filming persists, switch to a different brand of automatic dishwasher detergent.

Use a toothbrush dipped in warm soapsuds to clean the tiny crevices between appliance push buttons or raised-letter nameplates.

Periodically remove the cutting wheel and lid holder of your electric can opener and soak them both in a jar of hot sudsy water. Scrub away caked-on food with an old stiff-bristled toothbrush. Rinse, dry, and replace the parts.

To clean chrome knobs or decorations on an appliance, apply nail polish remover. (First make sure that the unit is unplugged, because polish remover is flammable.) Rinse the knobs or decorations with water.

To flush food particles from a meat grinder, run a raw potato or a slice of stale bread through it before washing it.

To prevent staining, coat rubber drain board trays with a thin film of furniture polish. Remove any stains with a mixture of bleach and water before applying the polish.

A soiled white porcelain sink will gleam like new if you line it with paper towels, spray them until soaked with household bleach, and wait an hour before rinsing.

To remove countertop stains, simply sprinkle with baking soda, rub with a damp cloth or sponge, and rinse with clear water.

If your laminated plastic countertop is marred by hard-to-remove stains, don't rub it with steel wool or abrasive cleaners; instead, try a solution of milk, bleach, and water. Let it sit for a minute and immediately rinse with water.

You can get rid of rust marks in a stainless steel sink by rubbing them with lighter fluid. Afterwards, thoroughly wash the sink and your hands.

Hard time deposits around faucets can be softened for easy removal by covering with vinegar soaked paper towels for about an hour before cleaning.

One way to clean porcelain surfaces is to rub them with cream of tartar sprinkled on a damp cloth. You can remove rust spots from metal surfaces the same way.

There are several ways to keep chrome surfaces glistening. You can rub them with dry baking soda sprinkled on a dry cloth, a cloth dampened with hot water and ammonia, or a cloth dampened with rubbing alcohol.

To brighten a dulled plastic laminate countertop surface, apply an appliance wax or a light furniture wax.

Coffee or tea stains can be removed by rubbing them with a damp cloth dipped in baking soda.

To remove coffee or tea stains from the interior of a thermos bottle, partially fill the container with crushed eggshells, add hot water, and shake well. To remove general stains from a thermos bottle's interior, fill the container with warm water and 1 tablespoon bicarbonate of soda, let stand for 3 hours, then wash.

Sweeten a coffeemaker's plastic basket by occasionally rubbing it with a paste of baking soda and water.

Loosen leftover egg and cheese residue on dinnerware by soaking in cool water.

For stains on acrylic kitchen utensils, wipe at once with a damp cloth. If the stains persist, use an all-purpose cleaner or moistened bicarbonate of soda. Always act as quickly as possible and never use harsh abrasives.

Soft cheeses can be cleaned from a grater by rubbing a raw potato over its teeth and openings. (A lemon rind or a toothbrush also does a first-rate cleanup job.)

If you spill cooked rice on the floor, it will be easier to sweep up after it dries provided you can avoid treading it into the floor in the interim.

A rubber window squeegee is ideal for scraping crumbs from tables.

Refrigerator and freezer odors can sometimes be eliminated by rubbing interior surfaces with a few drops of vanilla extract diluted in a cup of water. Some homemakers keep a cotton ball soaked with the extract inside the refrigerator all the time. Or leave an open box of baking soda, a dish of charcoal briquettes, or a lemon half in the unit. If odors still linger, clean all interior surfaces with club soda or a baking soda and water solution.

You can deodorize your kitchen by putting a spoonful of ground coffee in a container and heating it in the oven, or by boiling water containing a little ammonia.

Banish sink odors by washing the sink with a strong salt solution or with laundry bleach.

If you can't clean stove or oven spills and boil overs immediately, sprinkle them with salt to minimize odor.

If odors linger in pots and pans or other cooking utensils, try washing the utensils with a baking soda and water solution, or boil vinegar in them.

Rubbing salt into a wooden cutting board will both eliminate odors and lift stains.

You can remove all traces of fish, onion, or other odors from your hands if you wet them and

sprinkle on baking soda. Work the paste over your hands and then rinse away both soda and odor.

If a plastic container has a strong odor, pack it with crumpled-up newspapers, cover it snugly, and leave it overnight. The next morning the odor will be gone. Another effective treatment is to wash the container with baking soda and water.

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3. Kitchen Equipment and Supplies

To chop parsley successfully in the food processor, make sure the leaves are very dry by first whirling them in a salad spinner or patting them dry with a heavy towel.

Citrus zest used in a dessert recipe can be chopped in a food processor with a steel blade if some of the sugar from the recipe is placed in the work bowl with the zest.

To slice soft cheeses, such as Swiss or mozzarella, in the food processor, place the cheeses in the freezer for about 10-15 minutes before slicing.

The firmness of the cheese will make for more even slices with less strain on the machine.

When grinding hard cheese, such as Parmesan or Romano, in the food processor, be sure the cheese sits at room temperature for several hours before processing. Then cut the cheese into small cubes, and-with the machine running-drop them through the feed tube.

To slice flank steak, pork tenderloin, or boneless chicken breast in your food processor,

Partially freeze the meat before slicing. The meat will cut evenly into thin slices.

If unsalted butter is unavailable, you can make your own fresh butter in a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Process some cream until butter forms (about 5 minutes)' Drain off the

water and dry the butter well in a towel. One pint of heavy cream will make about 7 ounces of butter.

Almost any recipe can be adapted to the food processor. Carry out all the recipe directions involving dry ingredients first and then just wipe the bowl clean with a paper towel. Process the wet ingredients last.

Select cooking pans that are durable and made from a good heat conductor, such as copper, cast aluminum, heavy rolled steel, or cast iron. Specially treated aluminum pots and porcelain-lined cast iron pans won't react to acid or cream foods.

Top-quality carbon steel or combination carbon and stainless steel knives are essential to good cooking. Knife edges should be sharpened on a steel or ceramic sharpener before each use.

Knives should be reground professionally every 4-6 months, depending on use.

When cooking with a wok on an electric stove, position the ring so that the narrow opening is on the bottom. This will bring the wok closer to the high heat needed for successful stir frying.

The best type of pastry bag is plastic lined.

The canvas makes the bag easy to grip, and the plastic lining makes it easy to clean.

You'll ingest more iron if you cook in cast-iron pots because foods absorb iron from the pots.

For example, stew simmered for several hours in an iron pot contains at least 25 times as much iron as stew simmered in an aluminum pot.

If one drinking glass is tightly nested inside another, don't try to force them apart. You may crack both. Rather, fill the top glass with cold water and immerse the lower one in hot water.

The top glass will contract slightly, and the bottom one will expand, so they'll come apart easily.

To sweeten a sour-smelling waste disposer, feed it orange, grapefruit, or lemon rinds. A tablespoon of borax or baking soda also does the trick.

Create extra counter space when cooking for a crowd or baking for a holiday by placing trays or cookie sheets across pulled out drawers.

If you put marbles or a jar lid in the bottom of a double boiler, their rattling will alert you if the water boils away.

To make a tray of fresh ice cubes quickly, leave 3 or 4 cubes in the tray when you refill it. The already frozen cubes help cool the fresh water and speed the freezing process.

To prevent ice cube trays from sticking to the freezer shelf, line the shelf with waxed paper.

To be sure that cake tins are completely dry before you store them, place them in a warm oven for a few minutes.

To avoid burning your fingers when lighting a pilot light with a regular-size match, clamp the match with kitchen tongs that will extend your reach.

If you keep plastic wrap in your refrigerator, it won't cling to itself when handled.

If the rubber gloves you're wearing won't come off because you've forgotten to sprinkle powder on your hands, hold your gloved hands under the cold tap water. The gloves will slip right off.

To start a fresh bottle of ketchup flowing, push a drinking straw to the bottom of the bottle.

When you remove the straw, the ketchup will pour easily.

An electric beater won't sound so loud if you put a damp dishcloth under the bowl to muffle the noise.

A gravy boat makes a good server for spaghetti sauce.

A squeaky oven door can be silenced by rubbing the point of a soft lead pencil across the hinges.

If salt pours out of your salt shaker too liberally, plug up some of the holes with clear nail polish.

Put a few grains of rice in your salt shaker to keep the salt from caking.

If you put a dab of butter under the spout of a pitcher the contents won't run down the side after you pour.

New drinking glasses sometimes crack when you pour hot liquids into them. They won't if you "season" them this way: Put them in a large pot filled with cold water, bring the water slowly to a boil, and then turn off the heat and let the water cool.

When you buy an electric coffee maker, look for one with water markings on the inside. They're easier to read than markings on the outside.

Pot holders protect against cold as well as heat, so wear your kitchen mitts to protect your hands when rearranging frozen foods in the freezer.

When driving home from the store, strap seat belts that aren't being used around bags containing items that could be spilled or broken.

Selling your offerings at a bake sale? They'll move faster if you include the recipe. People like to know the ingredients= and how to duplicate your goodies.

You can improvise a sink or tub stopper from the plastic cover of a coffee can. Lay the cover across the drain and suction will hold it firmly in place.

Is the key or tab on a can missing or damaged? Just turn the can over and open it with an ordinary can opener.

You can do more with toothpaste than brush your teeth or remove spots. It also works as an adhesive, perhaps for hanging lightweight pictures and posters on your kitchen walls. When you eventually remove the pictures or posters, just wipe away the toothpaste with a damp cloth. There will be no nail holes to repair.

You can sharpen garbage disposer blades by running ice cubes through them.

Because instructions on bottle labels are frequently in tiny, almost unreadable print, it's a good idea to keep a magnifying glass handy.

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