

around the HOUSE

What's Cooking?

Accessible cooktops and ovens make the kitchen experience fun and creative.

The kitchen is often the social gathering space in a home, and cooking is usually the main focus. Accessible cooktops and ovens help make food preparation easier and the atmosphere enjoyable for everyone.

A kitchen designed with easy access further enhances the cooking experience and becomes a social interaction place for people of all ages and abilities. A minimum 30 x 48-inch area of clear floor space should be in front of all the appliances, as this allows much easier access for anyone who uses a mobility aid. If an island or table is located in the center of the kitchen, the aisles should be 42–48 inches wide, allowing room for wheelchairs, walkers, and multiple cooks. Cooktops and ovens should provide similar access.

Hot Topic

Cooktops offer design flexibility because they can be located on an island or any other place with adequate counter space. They should have front- or side-mounted controls for easy access. Imagine a wheelchair user or any seated person reaching over the hot elements to reach the controls. This is an obvious and potential danger. The burners should be staggered for safety and easier use, and possibly feature cool induc-

A heat resistant pull-out shelf under an accessible microwave makes it easier for a seated user to slide out a hot dish and set it down right away.

tion units or automatic shut-offs for maximum safety. Ideally they will have at least 6–12 inches on either side of the cooktop. You may find there are more gas cooktops that have front or side controls than electric units.



Cooktops need a minimum 29 inches of open knee space below. The space can also be used to store a rolling cart when it's not in use.

The electric controls may also have touch pads located flat on top of the cooktop unit that might make them more difficult to see, especially if there is glare. A slightly angled or beveled control panel might be a clever solution, located toward the front to allow a seated user easier visibility. It's not known if such a design already exists.

Accessible Accessories

Cooktops are ideally located at a variable surface height for easy use and will accommodate seated users. There should be a minimum 29 inches of open knee space below. A top surface height of 34 inches is ideal so a seated person can reach farther toward the back burners, making it easier to see into their cookware and retrieve it.

A rolling cart is a helpful item for a wheelchair user and a good idea that can be placed under the open knee space when not in use. A wheelchair user can then use the cart to move food and other cooking items from any-





A cooktop should be higher than 34 inches so a seated person can reach toward the back burners.

or open flame. Only the area under heavy cookware gets hot; the copper coil itself does not become hot nor does the rest of the cooktop or the other burners. Copper-bottomed or glass and ceramic cookware will not heat up with this type of unit.

The Oven

Wall ovens should be installed at a height that allows direct safe and easy access as opposed to bending over to place and remove the cookware. Depending on your needs, the oven should be installed so its base is 29–34 inches above the finished floor. A side swinging door model is easiest to access, and a heat resistant pull-out shelf should be located directly below so you can slide out and set down a steaming pan.

Seek out ovens with increased glass viewing area and lighting for better visibility. Ovens should have controls that are easy to read and use, similar to other appliances. The most effective racks will easily pull out on ball-bearing extensions, and they may be ergonomically designed to fit an oven mitt.

There are even drawer microwaves and warming drawers that will pull out and allow easy access from above. In this case you may want to provide a pull-out shelf to the side of the oven and toward the top height of the microwave unit so you can easily lift out and set down your meal.

Right for You

Industrial designers are leading the way with energy efficient and Universal Designed features in all appliances as they accommodate an ever aging and diverse population. Most importantly,

where in the kitchen to the cooktop.

A long gooseneck faucet that swings over the cooktop makes filling pots a breeze for those who have limited strength or use a wheelchair. This is especially helpful if the cooktop is on an island or another location not connected with the countertop common to the sink.

Many cooktops also incorporate “smart” features that can select proper

For serious cooks, the space between burners, grate size, and configuration are important factors. A burner with a star shape as opposed to the traditional round one will heat most efficiently.

Cool Heat

A wonderful safety feature is the use of induction cooktops. More household

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cooking times and temperatures for various foods. They are offered in electric, gas, or dual fuel with ceramic glass, stainless steel, and porcelain-coated steel tops. Ceramic glass cooktops can scratch, so be selective if you will be sliding pots across the various tops and be careful not to hang much above them as they may also crack. Cooktops may be designed with integrated downdraft ventilation.

fires start in the kitchen than in any room in the house; most are due to unattended cooking.

Induction cooktops use an electric coil of copper wire directly below the glass ceramic surface. When an electric current passes through this wire, it heats the cookware directly through the magnetic field it creates. It differs from other types in that there is no hot coil, heated surface,

Cooktops should be located to accommodate seated users and feature front- or side-mounted controls to prevent the need to reach over the burners.

as you select kitchen appliances try and visualize how you will use them for your lifetime and verify as best you can that you are able to operate them easily. Nonetheless, usability will most likely vary with each individual, so take your time and select what's most comfortable for you.

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