HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

INSTALLING KITCHEN CABINETS

Cabinetry is generally considered finish carpentry work. There is little room for error, especially since many cabinets are at eye level, where mistakes are particularly noticeable.

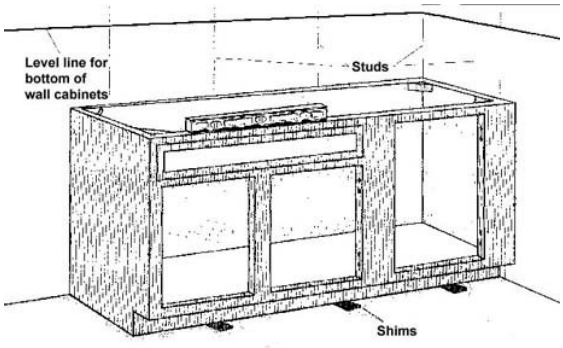
Nevertheless, cabinet installation is well within the abilities of most careful people with some skill. In addition to knowing some of the how-to, anyone trying to install cabinets must be able to exercise patience. (This is not a job to do at 7:30 p.m. while the kids run through the kitchen.) It also helps to have a partner for this project, as the upper cabinets can be heavy to lift into place.

TOOLS YOU'LL NEED

You don't need a lot of tools; a couple of good levels, a hammer, some clamps, an electric drill with a Phillips screw bit, and a straight length of 2 x 4 should be sufficient. You will probably need some shim material, as well, to compensate for floors and walls that aren't level and plumb.

LAYOUT

First, you'll need to draw vertical lines to indicate the location of the wall studs to which you will be attaching your cabinets. (If you are replacing old cabinets, the holes where they were mounted may show you where some of those studs are.) Set your base cabinets in position, and level them with shims underneath, front to back and side to side. Measure up 19-1/2″ from the top of the base cabinet, and draw a line to indicate the bottom of the wall cabinets. Remove the base cabinet, and then take your 2 x 4 and screw it to the wall along the line you have drawn, checking to make sure it is level; in addition to helping you position the upper cabinets, the board will provide temporary support until the cabinets are secured to the wall.



Level line for bottom of wall cabinets, studs, and shims

INSTALLING THE UPPER CABINETS

1. It usually works best to assemble all the cabinets for one wall on the ground, attaching the cabinets to each other before mounting them on the wall as a single unit. Remove the doors and any loose shelves; then, align the frames and use C-clamps to hold them together while you screw each cabinet to its neighbor at the front, at both top and bottom, using 2-1/2 inch panhead screws driven from both sides. If the frames are hardwood, drill small starter holes before inserting the screws. If you have room, you can leave the clamps on for better support while you lift up the assembled cabinets and set them on the 2 x 4.

2. Check with a level held against the face of the frame to make sure the units are plumb; if they are not, insert shims behind the frame until they are. (The part of the shim that protrudes beyond the frame can be cut off with a hacksaw later.) Occasionally, you'll run into a corner of a wall that is so far from plumb that you'll need to cut into the wall and partially recess the back corner of the cabinet to get it to fit properly.
3. When the units are in place and you have made sure they are plumb and level, you're ready to screw the cabinets to the wall studs. Drill pilot holes and drive 2-1/2 inch panhead screws through the ledgers (the horizontal pieces of wood on the rear wall of the cabinet). If you have a double-door cabinet, add a second set of screws near the middle, at both top and bottom.
4. As you move to the next set of upper cabinets, reposition the 2 x 4 to support them; then, assemble the cabinet unit and set it in place as before. Clamp and screw these new cabinets to those already in place before attaching them to the wall. Continue around the room in this manner, until you have finished the upper units.
5. Fill any gaps between cabinets and wall with caulk or spackling; if the gap is very large, you can cover it with molding (filler strip). You should also use a filler strip where cabinets come together at right angles, to prevent the doors from banging against each other.
6. When you are done installing the upper cabinets, rehang the doors and shelves, remove the support board, and spackle over any screw holes in the wall.

INSTALLING THE BASE CABINETS

The lower cabinets are installed in much the same way, except that you have to deal with differences in floor levels. Most floors slope up or down; if you don't compensate for that slope, then the counter won't be level on top of the cabinets.

1. The easiest way to do this is to find the highest part of the floor with a level and measure up the wall at that point to the height of the top of the base cabinets. Using your level, extend a line from that mark all the way around the room where the cabinets will be installed. If you use this line as your guide when screwing the base units to the wall, the cabinets will all end up level and at the same height.
2. Clamp and screw the base cabinets together first, just like the upper cabinets, and then screw them to the wall along the line you marked. Fill any gap between the bottom and the floor with shims, and cover it with molding later on.
3. Cut openings in the sink base for water and drain pipes, using a drill and hole saw, jigsaw or keyhole saw.

> **PLUMB AND LEVEL**
>
> Make sure the cabinets are both plumb and level – if they aren't, problems are likely to develop later on, with doors failing to close as the frames rack themselves out of square.

Patience and attention to getting the cabinets plumb and level will produce an installation that you can be proud of for many years to come.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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