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Thursday, June 10, 1937

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Subject: "NEW LAYOUTS FOR OLD HOUSES." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Bulletin available, 1749-F, Modernizing Farmhouses.

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Some of the homemakers who are planning for the installation of new electrical equipment have found it necessary to rearrange their kitchens considerably. And that has led to the suggestion that other much needed improvements in the house might be accomplished at the same time. Once the carpenter is there it will not cost much more to have him complete other small jobs that have been wanted for years. Then the family avoids repeating the discomfort of living in the house while changes are being made.

Reports and surveys from all parts of the country show that during the depression many rural homes remained in poor condition because of lack of cash for improvements. Conditions are better now, so it's a good time to think about improvements.

No two homes will have the same needs. The bulletin published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, called "Modernizing Farmhouses" describes 13 different homes whose owners changed and improved them, and 5 others for which improvements were planned by the State agricultural colleges but not yet actually made. This publication gives "before and after" plans, showing the faults in the original houses, how they were overcome, and approximately what the improvements cost. It's full of good ideas which can be applied to other houses. I suggest that you send for a copy if you are planning any changes. The number is 1749-F, "Modernizing Farmhouses."

Among the various faults discussed, about half the owners complained that the kitchen served as a passageway to other parts of the house. The homemakers in these houses were tired of having the children run in from school and get in the way when they were busy, or having the men track through as they came in from the fields to wash up for meals. Sometimes, if the house had a bath-room at all -- but most of them had none -- the bath-room opened off the kitchen, again causing that room to be used as a passageway.

Since most of the new electric equipment will be used in the kitchen and a plan is being made, anyway, for its location, now's a fine opportunity to eliminate some of this needless kitchen travel. Many solutions of the problem are suggested in the bulletin. The simplest is to group the work centers at one side or one end of the kitchen. Then force the paths through the kitchen to cross outside the work area, even if a door has to be boarded up or permanently locked, and another door cut in another place.

Many of the modernized houses show new kitchens built on, in better positions, while the old ones are turned into pantries, farm offices, laundries, or even bed-rooms or living-rooms. Places for washing and hanging up work clothes are arranged on back porches or in entries or basements.

The modernizing bulletin shows many floor plans with added bath-rooms. If your problem has been getting convenient space for a bath-room, some of these suggestions may help. Sometimes a part of one room can be cut off without great loss of space. Then a hall and a bath-room can be fitted in, getting rid of the kitchen-passageway trouble at the same time.

Almost all the 18 houses lacked sufficient closet space. In the improved floor plans closets are tucked in most ingeniously. The easiest way is to put a rectangular or triangular closet in a corner of a bed-room, but this is not especially attractive. It is often possible to partition off two feet between rooms and make a closet for each one without losing any useful space.

How often we homemakers discover that if doors and windows were placed a foot or so to the right or to the left the furniture would go in so much more conveniently! Mr. Ashby, the author of Bulletin 1749-F, says that moving doors and windows is by no means impossible. The cost is not prohibitive. In many houses this one alteration has greatly improved the use of wall space. In making these changes it is necessary of course to be sure that the outside of the house is going to look well.

Houses that have had haphazard additions often have bed-rooms which can only be reached by going through other bed-rooms. The modern way is to redesign some of these rooms, placing partitions so that a three-foot hall gives access to them, with possible closet space as well.

Old-fashioned living-rooms were often too small for use in the present day way -- in fact, they were not living-rooms at all, but parlors, reserved for solemn occasions. In some of the houses the living-room was enlarged by removing the partition that made a hall alongside the stairs. This gave the effect of much greater space and the stairway leading up out of the room was attractive in itself.

I haven't time to tell you all the faults the 18 changed houses overcame, but some of the others were as follows: Fireplace or stove heating instead of a central heating plant with a furnace; having to go out-doors to get down cellar; poor light in the kitchen; lack of cross ventilation; especially on the top floor; stairways dangerously steep; no screens.

In one case a change in the location of the highway made it desirable to about-face the house. This was done, not by literally moving the house, but by changing the use of the rooms. The kitchen side was turned into the living-room side, by an addition facing in the desired direction, and used for the front of the house. Nothing is impossible when such changes are well thought out, and if possible, gone over with a competent architect.
