It’s been said many times: the kitchen is the heart of your home. That has never been more true than in today’s modern family kitchen. Formal dining spaces have given way to great rooms where cooking, dining, and entertainment are combined to bring families together. The right countertop can tie these spaces together. With so many countertop options available, it can be challenging to decide what will work best for you. This guide will help you get started.

**START WITH YOUR BUDGET**

There are two costs to consider, the countertop and the labor. Prices in this guide are approximate costs of the countertops, so you can quickly identify which materials fit your budget best. Labor—fabrication and installation—costs will vary greatly from one contractor to the next. When requesting an estimate, be sure it includes templating, edge details, sealing the tops, adding glossy finishes, backsplashes, installation, etc. Consider mixing materials if your space allows and your budget is tight.

**CONSIDER THE SINK FIRST**

*Will it be undermounted?* An undermounted sink is raised into place from below the counter. Choosing a countertop material that is waterproof is essential if you plan to have your sink under mounted.

*Will it be above mounted?* An above mounted sink is lowered from above so its edges overlap the countertop. Some materials don't handle standing water well. If you do a lot of dishes by hand and your sink is above mounted, consider a waterproof material such as solid surface, stainless steel or quartz.

*Do you want the sink and countertop to match?* A sink can be matched to solid surface countertops and stainless steel countertops.

**LOOK AT SAMPLES**

Look at the largest swatch size available to best visualize how a material will look in your kitchen. Quartz, laminate, solid surfaces, wood and recycled glass countertops are likely to match the swatches you see in the store. Natural stone (granite, marble) will vary greatly from one piece to another. Go to a stone yard to make your choice, and if you find a slab you like, put a deposit on it.

**SELLING SOON?**

To appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers, go neutral with your countertop choices.

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**Today’s Starmark**

CUSTOM CABINETRY & FURNITURE

600 E 48th Street North  Sioux Falls SD
Just east of the airport Doppler ball

T 605.977.3660 / T 800.669.0087
www.starmarkcabinetry.com

Monday – Friday 8-5
Saturday and evenings by appointment

Hardware and Countertops too
Granite | Quartz | Solid Surface | Laminate
Wood | Recycled Glass
### PROS & CONS

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**STAINLESS STEEL**

Stainless steel countertops are available in etched, textured and brushed finishes. Use in small doses—like an island—to avoid an institutional feel. Stainless steel is an impervious, durable, stain- and heat-resistant, anti-bacterial surface that requires minimal maintenance. It’s truly waterproof, making it a sound choice for undermounted sinks. It can be welded, ground, and buffed away to hide seams.

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**WOOD**

Planks of wood are glued together, and the position of the grain on these planks will determine the overall look of the countertop.

- **Face grain orientation** is when the wide sides of the boards are positioned as the countertop surface. It’s considered more decorative because it reveals more of the wood’s grain.
- **Edge grain orientation** is when the edges of the boards are upright, forming the surface.
- **End grain orientation** is when the ends of the boards are upwards, and is traditionally how butcher-block countertops are made.

Brands we carry: Thomas Creek Wood Tops, StarMark Cabinetry, Boos Block®

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**MARBLE**

Marble creates a classic, elegant look in the kitchen. In nature, marble is created when limestone or dolomite rock is under severe pressure and heat. The distinctive veining in marble results from impurities in the original limestone; the purest marble is white.

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**GRANITE**

Granite is a natural stone mined from the earth and cut into slabs. Granite countertops offer a rich, timeless beauty few other materials can match. We recommend: Rausch Granite, Syverson Tile & Stone for fabrication

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**LAMINATE**

Laminate countertops generally consist of layers of paper or fabric impregnated with resin over composition wood. Today’s laminates offer abundant options for edge treatments, and new adhesive techniques allow for undermounted sinks. Brands we carry: Pionite, Wilsonart, Formica, NEVAMAR®

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**TILE**

Tiles are typically porcelain, ceramic, or stone and are available in different sizes, ranging from 1-inch squares to 18-inch squares, and in various colors and shapes. We recommend: Syverson Tile & Stone, Thornton Flooring

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**SOLID SURFACE**

Made of polyester or acrylic resins combined with mineral fillers, SOLID SURFACE countertops imitate concrete, marble, and other types of stone, as well as quartz. The term “solid” denotes that the product is the same through and through. Brand we carry: DuPont™ Corian®, Hi-MACS®

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Laminate countertops are lightweight and offer color consistency. Laminate countertops are heat-, mold- and mildew-resistant. They work well in areas of heavy use but minimal abuse. Large sheets of laminate allow for fewer seams. Seams will show on the front edge between the backsplash and countertop. Post-forming makes them look continuous, but that option offers fewer color choices.

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<td>Since granite is porous, it will stain and harbor bacteria if not properly sealed and maintained. Some treated granite can go up to 10 years without being sealed, but most need to be resealed on a yearly basis.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $100 to $250 per square foot. Actual costs have been as low as $30 per square foot, and has gone well over $200 per square foot.</td>
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<td>Quartz won't resist impacts as well as granite, and its edges can chip. Quartz doesn't require sealing for stain protection.</td>
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<td>Laminate countertops scratch and chip more easily than solid surface, and can't be repaired. Textured finishes are better than flat finishes at hiding imperfections and mild damage. They can also look cheap.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $14 to $45 per square foot.</td>
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<td>Solid surface countertops are non-porous, and resist scratches, stains and mold/mildew. Prolonged exposure to heat can cause discoloration. Solid surface countertops are repairable with light buffing.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $90 to $175 per square foot.</td>
<td>The cost can rival that of quartz and granite, which are much tougher and more authentic looking.</td>
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<td>Grout and tiles may require additional resealing. Ridges and porous grout make tile countertops harder to keep clean, and more prone to staining. Choose epoxy grout for stain- and water-proofing and a darker grout to hide stains.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $3 to $25 per square foot.</td>
<td>Tile countertops require a plywood underlayment to be installed on the top of cabinets, which should be considered when measuring for cabinets, backsplashes and counter edging. Tile countertops are a good option for do-it-yourself installation because they are inexpensive and easy to install. Tile countertops create a custom look that might not appeal to everyone, which could be a problem if you plan to resell your house.</td>
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<td>If they are well cared for, wood countertops will not harbor any more bacteria than harder surfaces do. A natural oil finish is safe for direct knife work but requires regular cleaning and oiling. Wood countertops may absorb odors and stain more easily than other surfaces. They can be damaged by heat, cuts, scrapes, and impacts.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $30 to $200 per square foot.</td>
<td>Excessive exposure to vinegar can weaken adhesive between planks. Fluctuations in humidity affect wood, making it a poor choice for over a dishwasher or around a sink. Beware of standing water. Varnished wood is extremely stain resistant. It is not a good surface for food preparation, and is best for dining or entertaining surfaces.</td>
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<td>Marble is porous and some varieties of marble are more porous than others. It chips and scratches easily, and it requires more care than quartz. It cuts more easily than granite, but it is relatively easy to repair, as small nicks and cracks can be polished out. Many varieties require sealing to prevent staining, bacteria harborage and mildew growth.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $30 to $60 or as high as $120 or more per square foot depending on the material.</td>
<td>Since patterns are unique, it’s best to see it in person and hand select your slab. Not all marble countertops need to be quarried slab marble; there are cultured marble countertops that are more affordable.</td>
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<td>Scratches, dents and fingerprints may be hard to avoid with stainless steel. It can also be discolored by harsh cleaners like drain cleaners and hard water deposit removers.</td>
<td>Expect to pay from $45 to $75 or $75 to $140 per square foot.</td>
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**BEYOND THE EXPECTED.**

**RECYCLED GLASS COUNTERTOPS** are made by setting shards of recycled glass into resin. They are popular with environmentally conscious consumers, who give them high marks for being made from recycled material, and emitting low amounts of volatile organic compounds. Recycled glass countertops are comparable to granite in strength, durability, scratch- and heat-resistance and maintenance. Chips and stains can be a problem. Recycled glass countertops are best for contemporary looks when made from large shards. They resemble solid surfaces when shards are finely ground. Recycled glass countertops can be single or multi-colored. Their custom look might not appeal to everyone, which is something to consider if you will be reselling your home soon. Expect to pay about $106 and up per square foot. 

Brand we carry: **GEOS Recycled Glass Surfaces**

**BAMBOO** countertops are made by gluing and pressing planks or strips of bamboo together, then laminating to protect them from the elements. Available in several styles including a parquet pattern, bamboo countertops are made from bamboo, a rapidly growing renewable resource, and are eco-friendly if they haven’t been treated with chemicals. They are also naturally antibacterial. Regular resealing or re-laminating the surface will restore their fresh, natural look. While bamboo countertops are a beautiful, unique option for a modern kitchen, they may be best for show or for very light use areas. Bamboo countertops are easy to stain, scratch, slice, and nick, and because moisture can warp the material, they might not be the best option for around the sink. The wood may also darken over time.

Price per square foot is about $45 or more.

**BASALT** is a fine-grained black stone formed millions of years ago when volcanic lava fell into the ocean. It is a natural product that is nearly as hard as diamond and impossible to scratch. It is oil and grease resistant, and will not create dust. It doesn’t require any finish or sealer. Basalt is only available in black or dark grey.

**CONCRETE** countertops are made of cement, lightweight aggregates, and a combination of additives. Some type of reinforcement is used such as structural steel, wire mesh, fiberglass, and/or fibers. They are cured, ground, and sealed and can be poured in place or fabricated off-site and installed later. Available in unlimited color, shape and design options, concrete countertops can provide a unique look to your kitchen. These are handcrafted and can be tinted, textured, shaped, and set with inlays and stone chips. They are repairable and won’t stain if properly sealed. Seams in concrete countertops will look similar to the seams in marble or granite, which means you can see them, but they shouldn’t present an aesthetic problem. Concrete is a very hard material but it can chip, scratch and develop hairline cracks. Topical sealers can protect against stains, but not heat, while penetrating sealers can handle heat, but not stains. They will require occasional re-sealing.

Price per square foot can be $75 to $100, and the cost of fabrication is about $40 to $50 per hour. The true cost of a concrete countertop isn’t in the concrete itself, but rather the artisan’s creativity and time.

**COPPER** is a reactive metal with an orange-red base color that will turn brown with use indoors. Copper countertops are a good mid-price alternative to slab stone. They have the benefit of minimal joints because of the backsplash and the nailing are integral to the copper’s profile. Seams can be strategically placed in corners, cutouts or around drop-in cook tops and sinks.

Copper is naturally antimicrobial and will develop a patina and color unique to its use over time, often within one week after installation.

Nothing can prevent acids from etching and discoloring copper, but the resulting patina is part of copper’s charm. They will also dent from use, but mild surface texturing with a hammering effect can help hide these.

While maintaining the shiny copper finish is possible, it takes a lot of effort. Periodically rubbing the copper with a food safe oil will keep them looking nice.

It is challenging to find a coppermith. Expect to pay from $80 to $200 per square foot.

**PAPER** might not seem like an appropriate material for countertops, but when saturated with resin, heated, and compressed, the result is surprisingly stone like. While paper composite counters cannot be recycled from their final form, they are more eco-friendly than other petroleum-based solid surfaces. Well known brands include Paperstone, Shetkastone, Richlite, and EcoTop.

Paper composite countertops can stand up to heat, chipping and staining. Since it can be cut and routed like other solid-surface materials, it is versatile and a variety of edge treatments are possible. Handmade paper composite counters can be customized with integrated drain boards, trivets and sinks for a seamless, sleek look. Depending on the manufacturer, color options range from those that mimic natural stone to bold and unexpected shades.

Damage can occur, but scratches and scorch marks can be sanded out. However, it is difficult to do without creating a blemish, so refinishing the entire top is recommended.

**ZINC** is a reactive metal similar to copper but with a silver tone. Zinc countertops create a unique, rustic look in the kitchen.

Zinc is a good conductor so it can withstand heat. It is non-porous so surface layer spots can be buffed or polished out, but it’s a lot of work. Seams can be soldered and sanded down flush or hidden around cutouts. Use a mild cleanser.

As with copper, it can be challenging to find a metal smith to make zinc countertops. Zinc will react with everything from fingerprints to water to lemon juice, but this is considered patina.

The cost for zinc countertops varies greatly and depends on the metalsmith. A yearly application of mineral or other food safe oil will keep this top looking new. Expect to pay from $35 to $90 per square foot.

**SOAPSTONE** is a metamorphic rock consisting of talc, steatite, magnesite, quartz, and other magnesium rich materials and is quarried like granite and marble.

Soapstone has been a staple in labs for ages, because it is extremely durable and impervious to virtually all chemicals. It’s best for adding the beauty of stone to a low-traffic kitchen. Slabs vary so it’s best to go to a stone yard.

Soapstone countertops withstand heat very well. Soapstone can be sliced, scratched, and nicked. Small scratches can be repaired. It is non-porous, and resistant to staining and scorching.

It needs to be periodically rubbed with mineral oil, and can be left to age naturally or sealed for a darker, richer look.

Expect to pay around $50 and up per square foot.

**GLASS COUNTERTOPS** are made of solid, continuous pieces of glass. They are available in a variety of thickness from 1 to 6 inches, and can be clear, etched, molded, and textured. They complement an open, airy room design and can be back-painted or back lit for added elegance. Transparent glass may require finishing the tops of cabinets.

Glass countertops have hygienic qualities and require minimal care. They can get costly, so consider their use on an island or raised bar. Expect to pay from $65 to $200 per square foot.