

## Home Experts

TOP TIPS  
KEEP WASPS AT BAY

- Keep sweet things covered or indoors. If you dine outside, put drinks in resealable bottles. To seal homes, install flyscreens on windows.
- Stand still and don't wave your arms: the pests detect moving objects more easily than stationary ones.
- Buy wasp traps to keep them away from the house. Place them at the end of your garden. To make your own, take a jam jar with sweet residue inside and add a bit of water. Make two holes in the lid and string up from a tree to act as a decoy.
- Prevent new nests. Fill cracks, holes and entry points. Dispose of old nests to prevent new ones. Keep an eye out for new nests in early spring, when they are easier to destroy.
- Call the experts. Don't tackle a live nest yourself, as wasps are more likely to sting when threatened. Find a local member of the British Pest Control Association (bpcas.org.uk).

godhousekeeping.co.uk/  
institute

HOW TO...  
ORGANISE YOUR CUTLERY

Bespoke kitchens with grooves for fish knives and cake forks are now a thing. But if you are more laissez-faire with your flatware, Ella's Kitchen Company produces attractive painted wooden trays that can be carried to the table or tucked away in a cupboard (€45). Next does a handsome cutlery caddy in wood, with metal lop handles (£16). Habitat has a pretty utensil jar called Dewar, in white earthenware (£8). Rattan cutlery baskets with a carry handle and compartments for knives and forks, such as the Bembridge, from Garden Trading (£17.50), look pretty on worktops and add bistro style to an outdoor lunch table.

Katrina Burroughs

HOME  
HELPConservatory nightmares, and mushrooms  
marring the lawn – our experts have the answers

**Q** Last year I retired and moved into a new-build detached house. In June, I signed a contract with Anglian Home Improvements for them to build a conservatory in the garden, accessed from the patio doors. I was promised the conservatory would be started in September and finished by early October.

Anglian made a series of mistakes, culminating in water rising around the floor and permanently damp walls. Since December last year, the company has done nothing, and for more than three months it ignored my requests for an account of what is wrong and a solution. In April, Anglian suddenly announced that it intended to break up the concrete flooring and re-lay it, but still has not given full details of how it will prevent further water ingress and damage, or cure the damp walls.

I am at a loss to know how to ensure the work is done correctly, as the company

does not seem to give its workmen adequate instructions or supervision. My requests to speak to a manager who has appropriate building qualifications have been repeatedly brushed aside.

It is now nine months after the promised completion date, and more than six months since any work was done. This week, a manager has said he will send a new team of workmen to correct the faults, but Anglian seems to have no understanding of the distress they have caused in my retirement. I view any further dealings with the firm with apprehension.

AT, Staffordshire

**A** When dealing with a company whose complaints procedure seems to be lacking, it is worth asking whether it belongs to a trade association or professional body. Such bodies have codes of practice that are not legally binding, but set the standard of

quality consumers can expect. They also have arbitration schemes, which can be used to resolve disputes.

Alternatively, the Consumer Ombudsman handles all consumer complaints, with a focus on home maintenance and improvement. You can escalate your complaint to the ombudsman providing you have given the company a reasonable amount of time to resolve problems (usually up to eight weeks). If the company is willing to work with the ombudsman to resolve your complaint, they will aim to reach a resolution within 10 working days.

In circumstances where the original builder has failed to remedy the defects notified to them within a reasonable time, you are entitled to employ another contractor. Once you have accepted estimates from your new builder, these should be provided to Anglian, and you should tell it that you will be seeking to recover the costs from it in due course. On completion, send a letter to Anglian enclosing copies of the

PROBLEM OF  
THE WEEK  
CAN A BUYER RECOVER  
COSTS IF A SELLER  
PULLS OUT?

**Q** Last November, my daughter made an offer on a small terraced house, which was accepted. The agents said the vendor had a property in the Lake District, to which she would soon be moving. My daughter was pressured by the agents to use their mortgage brokers (whose recommended building society then insisted on her engaging a new solicitor, rather than using our family solicitor) and was encouraged to go ahead with a survey.

In February, she was told that the vendor did not, in fact, have another property, and that the house had been withdrawn from the market. She has spent more than £2,000 on surveys and solicitor's fees, which she can't afford. Does she have no option but to put this down to experience?

Lynne Haines, Somerset

**A** Sadly, it is unlikely that your daughter will have any recourse against the seller. Prospective property buyers incur costs at their own risk, and the vendor has no liability until a contract has been exchanged and

becomes legally binding. Prospective buyers might incur wasted costs: this was why home information packs were introduced in 2007, but these were scrapped in 2010, leaving sellers with only an energy performance certificate to provide.

If the estate agents have acted inappropriately, your daughter might have a right to complain to an ombudsman or redress scheme. There are three such schemes; estate agencies must be a member of one. Look them up at gov.uk/redress-scheme-estate-agencies.

Your daughter will need to exhaust the agency's internal complaints procedure first.

If she has no luck, a redress scheme can compensate up to £25,000, though awards are usually much lower. If the agency is a member of the Property Ombudsman (TPO), it will have signed up to the TPO code of practice. This requires agents to avoid practices that amount to "aggressive behaviour... pressuring a potential buyer to use associated services, for example to take out a mortgage through the in-house mortgage adviser or to use a particular firm of solicitors".

As for "no sale, no fee" solicitors, some might charge more for sales that do complete. As with anything, read the small print.

Ed Cracknell, senior associate, Russell-Cooke; russell-cooke.co.uk

final invoices and requesting payment within a specified period of time. Your letter should also warn that if it fails to pay, you will be forced to issue proceedings in the county court.

Instead of county court, you may take a dispute to arbitration, where an industry expert (in this case a structural engineer or surveyor) will make the final decision.

Finally, the Construction Act 1996 gives any party to a construction contract the right to refer the dispute to adjudication. This is a 28-day procedure and the adjudicator's decision is interim binding, until the dispute is finally determined by legal proceedings, arbitration or agreement. You should hire a solicitor for adjudication.

Rebecca Blundell, dispute resolution lawyer, Slater and Gordon; slatergordon.co.uk

**Anglian Home Improvements responds:** "Customer satisfaction is incredibly important to us. It is

never our intention to cause delay or dissatisfaction, and we are extremely sorry that, in this case, we have fallen short of the high standards we strive to achieve.

"I have personally been to visit the customer at her property, and a senior conservatory surveyor has been instructed to liaise with her as a priority, to ensure remedial works are completed to her satisfaction and this matter is resolved.

"Anglian has been manufacturing and installing home improvements for 50 years, and we take product quality and customer service very seriously. We are members of the Glass and Glazing Federation and the Conservatory Association, and are committed to abide by their standards and codes of practice. We are also members of the government-endorsed TrustMark scheme, and our products are certified by the British Board of Agrément."

Steve Whitecock, national operations manager, Anglian Home Improvements