

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

**Q** My husband and I need to downsize (we are aged 95 and 86), and would like to move to a retirement community with facilities. The problem is, we'd like a four-bedroom house and a private garden. We have only found places with communal maintained gardens. Our preferred area is the south of England.

Amoree Tanner, via email

**A** You may need to consider a trade-off between more extensive facilities and a larger property and garden, says Michael Vokes, executive director of Associated Retirement Community Operators (020 3697 1204, arcouk.org). Typically, properties in retirement communities have fewer than four bedrooms. In those with extensive facilities, most homes are flats (one to three bedrooms) with communal maintained gardens.

That said, a number of retirement villages have cottages or bungalows with a private patio or terrace. At Audley's Chalfont Dene retirement village, in Buckinghamshire, a two-bedroom cottage with a large private terrace is available for £990,000 (audleyretirement.co.uk). Larger retirement properties tend to be in smaller developments with fewer (or no) facilities and services: Blue Cedar Homes's Holly Gardens, near Bath, offers detached homes for the over-55s, with gardens that afford more privacy (bluecedarhomes.co.uk). Back in Buckinghamshire, Anchor's Denham Garden Village might be a good compromise. This is an established community and the

gardens tend to be private patios or terraces. Three-bidders go for £650,000 and up (anchour.org.uk).

If you're prepared to look further afield, some of the Waterside bungalows at Middleton Hall retirement village, in Co Durham, have four bedrooms and private patios. Prices start at £338,000 (middletonhallretirementvillage.co.uk).

Four bedrooms is the likely stumbling block, not the private garden, says Nick Freeth, managing director of Retirement Homesearch (retirementhomesearch.co.uk; call 01425 632219 for more information). Renaissance Villages has homes with up to three bedrooms and private patios in Hampshire, West Sussex, Devon and Warwickshire (from £470,000; renaissancevillages.co.uk). If these options don't fit the bill, Freeth suggests asking the developer to convert a garage. Alternatively, you could buy a smaller property for yourself and another one in the village for guests, but check the lease first.

If these options don't fit the bill, Freeth suggests asking the developer to convert a garage. Alternatively, you could buy a smaller property for yourself and another one in the village for guests, but check the lease first. "We've had buyers purchasing adjacent properties and knocking through – then the work has to be reversed on resale," he says. Audley Retirement Villages also has two- and three-bedroom houses with private gardens in several locations – Kent, Berkshire, Devon, Bristol – from £645,000. At the Woodchester Valley Retirement Village, in Gloucestershire, the four-bedroom cottages with gardens have all sold, but there's a three-bedroom home for £330,000 (woodchestervalleyretirementvillage.co.uk). For a list of all retirement developments in the UK, visit [housingcare.org](http://housingcare.org).



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**Q** The warm weather makes me want to replace my french doors with bifolds. What do I need to know?

DH, via email

**A** French doors are about 117cm wide. For bifolds, you need an opening of at least 185cm. Bifolds come in configurations of one plus three, one plus four and so on – the one being the pass door, which is hinged and opens separately, while the other doors fold like a concertina. The stiles (vertical pieces of material framing each door) can be quite noticeable, a larger opening allows for more glass and looks better. The doors are attached to a track at the top and bottom, which can be unforgiving if not kept clean – the mechanism can stick and replacement parts are often expensive.

It pays to buy good quality: recommended manufacturers include Jeld-Wen, Bereco, Architectural Doors and Windows, Solarlux, Kloeber, Schüco, Sunfold and Sunflex. For a set that's 270cm wide, fitted in an existing opening, you'll pay about £5,000. Widening the opening may be within permitted development rights, but check with the local authority.

Stephen Risi is the director of Ballina Construction; [ballinaconstruction.co.uk](http://ballinaconstruction.co.uk)

**Q** Do you need help from one of our experts? Email your questions to [homehelp@Sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:homehelp@Sunday-times.co.uk). Advice is given without responsibility.

**Q** My kitchen appears to be infested with maggots and moths. In a cupboard where I had stored sealed packs of biscuits, rice, nuts and other dry goods, I found mesh-like webs and what looked like dead maggots. I have cleared out the cupboard, cleaned the shelves and thrown out the food or sealed it in bags, but there are now small moths around the house. Please help!

Susan Packman, via email

**A** It sounds as if you have multiple infestations of moths and their maggot-like grey/brown caterpillars. House moths (*Endrosis sarcitrella*) and Indian meal moths (*Plodia interpunctella*) are just two of the many common cosmopolitan food pests in the kitchen. Eggs or larvae usually arrive with your groceries, having been packaged in warehouses around the globe. These are not the fabric-eating moths that attack clothes and carpets; they subsist on tiny packets of spilled food under the cooker or behind the fridge.

Cleaning everything and deep cleaning is the only option. Store food in tough glass, tin or plastic containers, as even sealed plastic bags are too weak. Despite the flimsy appearance of the adults, the caterpillars have tough jaws and can get through paper, card, cellophane and polythene bags. I've had them chew into foil-covered chocolate bars and Oxo cubes.

Richard Jones is the author of *House Guests, House Pests* (Bloomsbury £9.99); [bugmarjonnes.com](http://bugmarjonnes.com)

**Q** I own a piece of land that provides access to a garage at the rear of my property, but also to the front and rear of two rows of terraced houses. The access to the front of the houses is a tarmac road with grass verges on either side, and I have been maintaining the verges – grass-cutting and tree care – at my own expense. Each property has a covenant within their deeds stipulating that the householder should make a fair contribution towards the maintenance of the verges. I am now looking to implement an annual service charge to cover this cost, but have not received payment from all of the owners. I have written to them, but have had no response. What is the legal validity of the covenant, and can I apply through the small-claims court for the debt to be paid?

James Duley, via email

**A** The difficulty with freehold covenants is that they are usually made when the original plots of land are sold off and developed. The properties then change hands over time, and whether new owners are bound by the covenants is subject to complicated rules. You will need advice from a solicitor. Whereas restrictive covenants (promises not to do something) can sometimes be enforced against subsequent owners of the land, positive covenants (promises to do something) are usually enforceable only against the person who made the original promise – the first owner of the property, for instance.

One exception to this is where there is a scheme requiring each new owner to sign up to the covenants each time the properties are sold. You should check Land Registry records to see who currently owns each house and whether they have signed a deed of covenant in relation to the maintenance charges. Any such deed of covenant may contain specific provisions about how charges are to be demanded, and they must be observed before you take any defaulters to court.

Ed Cracknell is a senior associate at Russell-Cooke solicitors; [russell-cooke.co.uk](http://russell-cooke.co.uk)

## TOP TIPS

Make the most of the good weather – while it lasts – with these gadgets for outdoor dining.

■ Shield food from wasps and flies with Lakeland's reusable food covers. The pop-up covers come in three sizes, with the smallest fitting a dinner plate and the largest big enough for salad bowls. Ideal for picnics, they fold flat for storage. From £5; [lakeland.co.uk](http://lakeland.co.uk)

■ Keep your wine cool with the Host Chill Cooling Pour Spout. Put it in the fridge for two hours, then insert it into a bottle for

perfectly chilled plonk.

It also acts as a stopper, should there be any left over.

£18; [thefowndry.com](http://thefowndry.com)

■ A wireless lamp that's lightweight and portable is ideal for when the sun goes down. Fabby's Edison the Pet is splash-resistant, has three levels of lighting and glows brightly for six hours – when it runs out, use the USB cable to recharge it.

£65; [shop.fabby.com/goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute](http://shop.fabby.com/goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute)



## Home help

Whether you're confused by freehold covenants or fighting moths and maggots in your kitchen cupboards, our experts are here to offer advice



Illustration: Ronald Hewson