

Q When our home was built 40 years ago, it was far from mains services, so septic tanks were used. We now have a housing estate adjacent to us that has mains sewerage. We have looked into connecting to this a sewerage line would have to be run from the estate down our road. It has been suggested that we would have to incur the £100,000-plus cost. Given that gas and water mains have been provided along our road, is there not an authority that is obligated to provide a mains sewerage line on it?

John Davies, Camberley, Surrey

A A homeowner must by law ask the local sewerage undertaker (usually your water supplier) for consent to be connected to the public system. Failure to apply can be a criminal offence. It will then decide if the proposals can work and do not adversely affect the sewerage system. If it accepts, and you ask it to do the works, this would be at your cost. You would also have to pick up the bill if you instructed your own contractor to make the connection. Check whether consents are needed from Highways England and the local authority.

Regardless of the fact that there are existing gas and water mains pipes, it seems the most cost-effective option is to retain the septic tanks. I suspect that emptying and maintaining the tanks will be much less expensive than building a sewerage connection from the nearby housing estate and along your road.

Donall Murphy, partner at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk

Q We own a 1970s house with a large south- and west-facing garden on heavy clay; it is often waterlogged in winter. The field behind our house is likely to be turned into a housing estate, so we'd like to protect our privacy with trees at the bottom of the garden, about 60ft from our house. We would like foliage all year. Which trees would thrive?

Herritt Family, Winchcombe

A Wait until building starts: knowing the exact positioning of overlooking windows is vital to tree selection and positioning. You'll have a better idea of where trees are needed and time to prepare the soil: dig in lots of inert organic material to improve structure and drainage.

For a natural, cohesive look, use a mix of evergreen and deciduous plants. The following grow well on clay and provide variety and year-round interest: conifers such as *Thuja plicata* (western red cedar), *Pinus nigra* (Austrian pine) and *Picea omorika* (Serbian spruce) provide total screening; they can dominate, though, so should be used sparingly. Smaller trees such as *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree), *Cotoneaster 'Cornubi'* and *Ilex* (holly) species also have year-round foliage.

Evergreens such as *Quercus ilex* (holm oak), *Photinia × fraseri* (Christmas berry) and privet can be trained as standards; regular pruning will control their height. Deciduous species including alder, amelanclier, birch, hawthorn, apple and plum allow dappled shade in summer and light in winter. Narrow pyramidal and columnar trees such as *Liquidambar styraciflua* (Slender Silhouette), *Pyrus 'Chanticleer'* (ornamental pear) and *Carpinus 'Fastigiata'* (hornbeam) are great for filling in between other trees where the canopy is restricted.

Mark Dumbellon, head gardener at Hauser & Wirth Somerset; hauserwithsomerset.com

Q The corridor in my rented flat has water damage from a leak that came from upstairs. My landlord came round to inspect it, but should I get

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written proof of this so that I'm not liable for repairs when I come to the end of the tenancy? Four months on, he has not fixed the damage. An estate agent handled the contracts and inventory initially. How can I ensure he sorts out the leak?

VC, Wapping

A To protect yourself, write to your landlord thanking him for his visit and confirming what you saw together – keep copies of all your correspondence. Call and write to him regularly to document that it hasn't been fixed. There is no logical way that you would be liable for repairs or redecoration, as the leak has come from the flat above. Your landlord might consider deducting the repair cost from your deposit, but he would be ill advised to do so – deposit protection legislation should prevent this. Though you can't force your landlord to fix the leak, you could inform him that you will have no choice but to leave if it is not done. I have known tenants to withhold rent over similar issues, but this usually ends in unpleasant conflict.

Tim Hassell, managing director at Draker Lettings; draker.co.uk

Q We had a new kitchen designed and fitted by Magnet at the end of last year. All the units and all but one of the appliances – a Zanussi integrated dishwasher – were sourced from the company and the installation was carried out by one of its recommended installers.

From the first use of the dishwasher, there has been a problem. Steam came out from the top left side and there was a small amount of water on the floor. Zanussi sent out an engineer. He said the chassis of the dishwasher was twisted and it had not been installed correctly. We contacted both Magnet and the installers. The installers admitted they had problems fitting the dishwasher, as our kitchen wall "was not straight". So they inserted a small piece of wood between the dishwasher door and the external door. But they've had to come back several times and haven't solved the problem.

On the last occasion, two different men from the installation company turned up and said the seal was at fault. So a Zanussi engineer came and fitted a new seal, but he also said that the chassis was twisted, and that this was causing the problem. We sent a copy of the engineer's report to Magnet and the installation company in August, but have had no reply. What can we do next? The dishwasher works, but we do not want to continue to have steam coming out of it, damaging our new work surface and the casing in the long term.

Mr and Mrs P Robinson, via email

A As you say the new kitchen was designed and fitted at the end of last year, the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA), which came into force just over 12 months ago, should apply to your contract. (If you entered into the contract before that date, the rules will be different.) Assuming that the CRA

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

applies, then under section 15 of the act, the goods must be installed correctly. Goods must also be of satisfactory quality and description,

and fit for purpose. The installation process is a service under the CRA, and must be performed with reasonable care and skill.

As the installers admitted to you that they had problems fitting the appliance and had to put a piece of wood between the dishwasher door and the external door, you are entitled to a repair or replacement product under section 23 of the act. Alternatively, you have the right to a price reduction or, ultimately, the right to reject the product entirely with a refund under section 24. You are outside the initial six-month period, so the final right to reject with a refund is subject to a deduction for use.

In the first instance, you should write to Magnet and the installers, setting out your rights under the CRA and what remedy you are seeking.

Clare Durkin, dispute resolution lawyer at Slater and Gordon; slatergordon.co.uk

Magnet responds Situations like this can sometimes prove hard to resolve, as it is difficult to ascertain when responsibility for a fault lies with an item provided by one of our suppliers under the statutory warranty. In instances like this, we work closely with the appliance supplier to evaluate what the issue is, with the aim of reaching a satisfactory outcome for the customer as soon as possible.

Zanussi responds We are unable to comment without knowing exactly what happened. We will make contact with the customer today, with a view to arranging an on-site appointment with the installer and service engineer at the same time. This will allow us to ensure everybody understands what the issue is and to take appropriate action to resolve it.

TOP TIPS

Summer's gone, so it's time to pack away floaty dresses and shorts. Here's how to store them properly over the winter.

■ Before you store clothes for the winter, launder or dry-clean them. Make sure they are dry before you pack them away.

■ Don't iron clothes that are to be stored, and keep them away from starch. Both can weaken the fibres and make garments prone to tearing along the creases.

■ Store clothes in plastic, rather than wood, paper or cardboard boxes. It's waterproof and will protect them from pests. Cardboard and wood contain chemicals that transfer onto clothes and damage them; protein in the glue that holds them together attracts pests. If using plastic boxes, make sure they're airtight – some clothes, such as wool and other natural fibres, need to breathe.



■ goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute

Illustration: Rachel Newman



Home help

Unsure how to make your landlord deal with a leak, or who is responsible for fixing a faulty appliance? Our experts are here to advise