



Do you need help from one of our experts? Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility

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Home help

Whether you're doubting your title deeds or wondering how to revive your kitchen worktop, our experts are here to offer advice

Q To follow up on your recent question on testing a property for broadband, how can I test for a good mobile signal when I view a house?

GR, Cheltenham

A The signal strength can vary greatly according to which network you are signed up with. Many experts recommend checking websites such as opensignal.com. The problem is that trees, other buildings, hills and the thickness of the walls of the property will all affect the signal you receive indoors, as will the mobile provider.

Ask the occupiers what kind of a signal they get. If the property is vacant, or if they are being cagey, a good trick is to order a free pay-as-you-go Sim card from each of the UK's four network providers. You can sign up quickly to each online

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

HOW DO I TEST A MOBILE SIGNAL?

with no long-term commitment, as you will not be drawn into a contract. They should arrive within five days.

Once you have the Sims, switch them out of your phone as you walk around the property, keeping an eye on signal strength as you go from room to room. (Standing near windows only helps if you are facing in the direction of the cell mast.) The results will be far more detailed and useful than any signal map.

A slightly more expensive option – though one that's far more efficient if you're viewing several properties – is to invest in a Quad Sim mobile phone, which you can buy for about £60. This will allow you to walk around a property comparing the signal strengths of each of the network providers.

Dan Howdle, consumer telecoms expert at cable.co.uk

would result in criminal damage or some other offence, then via the courts.

Court proceedings can be expensive, so assess the value of the land to you and get professional advice about your chances of success. Ensure the contact details held by the Land Registry are up to date, too: if your neighbour applies for ownership, it will write giving you a limited period of time to object.

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

Q I have a rather dull granite kitchen worktop. Is there a paint that I can brighten it up with?

RB King, Plymouth

A If you paint over granite, it will discolour, says Oliver Glasgow, sales manager at the worktop specialist Topso. Instead, you could cover it with a quartz overlay. These are 12mm thick and come in bright colours. But it could cost £2,500 to do this for a medium-sized surface (six linear metres), so you might save £200-£300 if you simply replace the existing worktop.

If you're feeling bold, try a concrete overlay, then paint it, suggest the bloggers Wayne Perrey and Steph Bron, aka the DIY Doers. "We've seen great results from concrete overlays on marble vanity units, though painting it would be an experiment. Here's how we'd do it: sand the granite and add three or four layers of drywall mix concrete (Ardex Feather Finish), drying each one overnight. Sand, apply masonry paint and seal with Quikrete's Acrylic Concrete Cure & Seal. The materials should cost £150."

Q My bath and sink have rusty plugholes. How do I remove the rust?

VC, Wapping

A Scrub them with steel wool. If that doesn't work, mix white vinegar and lemon juice (3:1), spray on and scrub. Apply baking soda, too, and let it sit for an hour. Scrub and repeat. Too much hassle? Try a rust remover. If the hole is too damaged, buy a new one for £7; a handyman or plumber could fit it in less than an hour if straightforward (about £70).

Steven Zockoll, director of 0800handyman.co.uk

Illustration: Russel Herremann

Q Forty years ago, I claimed a piece of land by adverse possession. I registered it with the Land Registry.

Now a neighbour has decided to claim a portion of this land. He says that because I do not hold the original deeds to it, he has as much right to it as me. I intend to take him to court. Am I wasting my time and money?

H Smithson, Yorkshire

A If your name is on the Land Registry's online register of title, that is definitive proof that you own the land, whether or not you hold the original deeds. If, however, your neighbour is now in exclusive occupation of part of the land, it is possible he could apply to register that portion in his name after the relevant period (10 or 12 years, depending on when the occupation started). If he has not occupied it for that long, you should resume control of the land physically or, if that

