

Home Experts

TOP TIPS
PREPARE YOUR BARBECUE

- First, check that the barbecue is really clean. A good scrub with a stiff brush and warm soapy water should do the trick.
- If the grill looks beyond hope, soak it in a solution of biological washing powder, then scrub the bars with a metal scourer, rinse and dry. Even if it was cleaned last time, if it's been sitting in a shed or garden for ages, it needs a fresh scrub.
- Once you've finished cooking, sprinkle some sand in the drip tray — it will absorb the cooking juices and you can easily sweep it out afterwards.
- Leave a gas barbecue on for a while after you've finished cooking to burn off any food residue. It's easier to clean while still warm.

goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute



READERS' CLINIC

WHAT CAN I DO WITH OLD TINS OF PAINT?

Enid Ormerod, via email

Deborah Bardsley, Cambridge
Tins go quickly on Freecycle.org. I also pass them on to drama groups for painting sets.

Yvonne Talbot, Nuneaton
We were advised by staff at the dump to fill the tins with soil, sand, or sawdust, then leave for two weeks until the contents will have hardened. The tins can then be taken to the tip.

Chris Spriggs, via email
Try Community RePaint, run by Dulux, for recycling (communityrepaint.org.uk).

Wendy Anderson, via email
London Hazardous Waste collects up to 50 litres of old paint, free, up to three times a year. Register at cityoflondon.gov.uk.

Future questions
● Where can I find a thin bedside table (W25cm)?
● My bathtub floor slopes. How can I make it flat?

Send your tips, tricks and questions to homehelp@SundayTimes.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility



HOME HELP

Need help washing delicate curtains, or worried about your ailing box balls? Ask our experts

Q I recently had my bathroom refurbished. Now the hot tap in the basin produces only a trickle. The bath tap doesn't exactly gush, either. I have no gas, so the hot water comes from an electric immersion heater in an airing cupboard. To try to fix the problem, the builder installed a pump, which did produce a good "gush", but the water was rarely hot. He was then advised that the immersion heater should be in an attic, but I live in a flat. We raised the tank 40cm in the cupboard, but to no avail. My builder is out of ideas. What can I do? **Mrs R Arreman, Southampton**

A You have two issues to resolve: the volume of hot water available on demand and the hot-water flow rate to the taps, which is determined by the pressure gradient. You can solve both problems in one. Your first option is to install a larger direct hot-water cylinder that is "unvented", and so pressurised by the mains cold-water supply.

Makes to look out for include Everflo, Ariston and Heatrae Sadia; choose the largest one you can fit into the cupboard.

The second option is an electric combi boiler that provides hot water on demand, pressurised by the main cold-water supply, with an integrated storage cylinder. Choose the highest flow rate available. This option can also power wet central heating (radiators, underfloor).

Either way, have the mains pressure tested to ensure it is at least 1 bar when it enters your home. No flues are required, but the power cable must be correctly rated. As you live in a flat, check there are no restrictions on this work in the lease. Electricity is not a cheap way to generate hot water, but you can make use of lower-cost off-peak power if you opt for a direct unvented cylinder.

Michael Holmes, property expert for the Southern Homebuilding & Renovating Show (June 30 and July 1, Sandown Park, Surrey). Claim a free pair of tickets via homebuildingshow.co.uk/sthomehelp by June 29

Q My ceiling leaked onto my slubbed silk curtains, which now have a dark stain. I am told dry-cleaning won't work, and could make it worse. How can I salvage them? **Esme Poppleton, via email**

A Colour in silk can be unstable and run easily. Silk is (mostly) washable, but curtains are often lined with different fabrics, so you must separate these to avoid disaster. Silk made in the 18th century is easier to wash than the 19th-century stuff, which was mixed with lead: this gave it weight, reducing the amount of silk needed, but made it more fragile. Take silk curtains to an antique fabrics expert, not a dry-cleaner. I recommend Janie Lightfoot Textiles, in northwest London (janielightfoot.co.uk).

Dr Ulrike Montigel, owner of Galerie Arabesque, which will be exhibiting at the Art & Antiques Fair Olympia, London W14, June 20-27 (olympia-art-antiques.com)

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

THE BOUNCY CASTLE NEXT DOOR IS RUINING MY LIFE

Q We've lived next to a pub for 19 years. The noise from its garden does not bother me. My problem is with a bouncy castle they put up next to my garden wall. The noise from the children, and the constant hissing from the air blown into it, is awful — I cannot sit outside. I have contacted environmental health, but there was no solution. Last year, my husband confronted the landlord, who agreed to put it up only once a month. But after my husband died recently, the bouncy castle has been up five times in a week. My sister rang the pub and was told it will be up "every Sunday" in summer. I'm desperate. I shake when the castle goes up. I lose sleep. I go out on weekends, close windows. I worry it will be hard to sell my home. What can I do? **Anonymous, via email**

A In the quaint words of 19th-century court judgments, a common law nuisance is "an inconvenience materially interfering with the ordinary comfort physically of human existence, not merely according to dainty modes and habits of living, but

according to plain, sober and simple notions among the English people". In other words, the interference must be considered to be unreasonable not just by the person experiencing it, but by any reasonable person. Other factors are: location; duration; the time it occurred; frequency and intensity; and maliciousness.



I can well understand how the noise and hissing affect your enjoyment of your garden, but equally it would be open to a court to take the view that the sound of children playing is pleasant, and not a material interference with the comfort and convenience. As the noise is usually limited to summer weekends, I would have concerns about your chances of succeeding at court.

To progress the claim, it would be a good idea to employ an acoustic consultant to report on the level of noise, but that will be expensive. You should also maintain a noise diary. Asking a solicitor to write to the pub might convince them to reduce the nuisance, but you will have to disclose any disputes and complaints to prospective buyers, so this course of action may not be wise.

If your complaints to the council end up putting off potential buyers, you could talk to an estate agent about selling your home at auction.

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

Q My box balls are looking sickly, and I have seen caterpillars on them. Is there a pesticide I can use? **CD, Balham**

A Box leaves used to shrug off pests and disease as if they were coated in Teflon. But no more... the plants have been hit by a double whammy: a blighter of a fungal disease, aptly named box blight, is desiccating the foliage, while a caterpillar that is new to our shores is devouring the leaves.

The latter has hit the top of the Royal Horticultural Society's UK pest list and is prevalent in the gardens of London and the southeast, where it can take only a fortnight from the first sign of attack to a whole hedge losing its leaves.

The box tree caterpillar looks like the larva of the cabbage white butterfly, but is a faster eater and infinitely more cunning, hiding inside a homespun silk

web that protects it from weather. As with cabbage whites, you can use pyrethroid insecticides (which are considered organic) to curb and kill them.

You could also try natural sprays such as SB Invigorator (eco-friendly) and Nemasys Fruit and Veg nematodes, which attack naturally occurring caterpillar-killing microscopic worms. Because the pests' webbing is so effective, treatments need to be applied at high pressure and repeated regularly to kill both the adults and the babies that hide in there.

The most effective remedies are those applied early, so if your box starts to look under the weather, investigate why — and if caterpillars are present, act fast!

Toby Buckland is a garden writer and the host of tobygardenfest.co.uk

DO YOU NEED HELP FROM ONE OF OUR EXPERTS? Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility

