

Home Experts

THE BEST...

QUIET APPLIANCES
These appliances have won Quiet Mark awards after acoustic tests deemed them among the quietest in their category

WASHING MACHINE
Samsung WW10M86DQ00/EU, £1,197; johnlewis.com 83/100

Performed well in rigorous tests; 10kg capacity; large drum and porthole so easy to load; intuitive features; great stain removal.

TUMBLE DRYER
Miele TWF505WP EditionEco Silence, £1,099; miele.co.uk 86/100

Easy to use; good results on cottons and synthetics; power use low; caused no serious shrinkage; laundry dry at end of cycle.

KETTLE
KitchenAid 5KEK1522, £130; johnlewis.com 86/100

Performs brilliantly, looks great. You can adjust temperature to preferred setting (from 50C up).

goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute



READERS' CLINIC

HOW DO I AVOID BLOCKED PIPES UNDER THE KITCHEN SINK?

D Bale, London

Lisa Blotsfelds
Easy: empty washing-up water down the loo.

Mike Maisey
Mr Muscle sink and drain foamer is a quick fix.

Marilyn Pyke
Once a week, put two squirts washing-up liquid and 2tbsp washing soda down hole. Pour kettle of hot water down (not boiling, that may damage pipes).

Siobhan Readhead
Never wash food debris or fat down sink. Use a sink strainer. Scrape grease out of pans before washing.

Future questions
● Any home remedies for bedbugs?
● How do I remove or prevent silver tarnish?

Send your tips, tricks and questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk



HOME HELP

Are you peeved by pongy pigpens, or does your coir carpet need a clean? Our team is on hand

Q The farmer next door has set up three pigpens housing 10 pigs each in a field that backs onto our garden. The nearest one is only 16ft away, and we have to suffer the stench and flies. What rights do we have to get them moved?
John Thorne, by email

A First, have a conversation with the farmer to see if he can do something to make life easier for you. Legal action is often expensive, stressful and time-consuming, and can damage relations with neighbours.

If the friendly approach fails, consider making a complaint to the local authority. It must investigate and may consider serving an abatement notice if it decides that the smell and the flies amount to a statutory nuisance. Some larger farms require an environmental permit; if this one does, check with the Environment Agency whether it is being breached.

Separately, you might have a private nuisance claim. The court can require the farmer to take steps to abate the nuisance if it sees the pigs as a

substantial or unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of your property. Such a claim would be expensive, and specific advice should be taken.

It's also worth asking a planning consultant whether the pigpens would be considered as permitted development or whether your neighbour needs planning consent, in which case you could write to the council's enforcement team.

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

Q Our 10-year-old blue front door has faded below letterbox level, while the upper section, which has been protected from the sun by a canopy, is still the original dark blue. It's a composite door. How do we deal with this?
Valerie Johnson, Auckland

A You have two options. You could rub down the whole door with fine sandpaper, then recoat it with the paint you used before. Or you could

remove all the paint from the door and redecorate with something else. To warn you: blue pigments are not the colourfast. Mineral pigments are better than synthetic dyes, but nothing will protect entirely against the effects of sunlight: a blind or curtain is most effective.

I would always choose a linseed-oil paint for external joinery, especially if your composite door is at least part timber. This paint is breathable and accommodates the movement of wood, so is less likely to crack or blister. Its pigment tends to migrate to the surface, the first line of defence when it comes to protection from light. And a linseed-oil paint can be revived by wiping it with a coat of raw linseed oil, rather than having to repaint. A good supplier is linseedpaint.com.

Edward Bulmer, founder, Edward Bulmer Natural Paint; edwardbulmer.co.uk

Q How can I find out the value of my property in past years?
Jackie O'Mahony

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

WHAT IF I FIND A FALSE WIDOW SPIDER AT HOME?

Q I read that some London schools have closed because of false widow spiders. Should we be worried at home?
JG, Stratford, London

A After reports that seven London schools were closed because of infestations, people are worried that they will have to run the arachnid gauntlet every time they go out of the front door or put their bicycles away. There's really no need to panic.

Spiders are venomous, but most do not have strong enough fangs to get their poison through thick, tough human skin. About half a dozen of the 670 British species are able to give a slight nip, which feels like a bee or wasp sting. This does not make them a public health hazard.

It's extremely rare to get an infection due to a spider bite in Britain. In fact, you are more likely to get a pus-filled wound, a necrotic ulcer or a bloated limb from a rose-thorn scratch.

There are three species of these small, plump, mainly glossy black spiders: the two-spotted *Steatoda bipunctata*, the noble-looking *Steatoda nobilis* and the

slightly larger *Steatoda grossa*. They arrived here in the 1870s and have been lumped with the unfortunate English name "false widows" because they are vaguely similar, and distantly related, to the infamous, but not British, black widows.

Rabbit-hutch spiders or garden-shed spiders would have been a more accurate appellation.

Warmth-loving species, unhappy in our damp and cool climate, they occur mainly in southeast and central England, and prefer sheltered, dry locations such as hollow tree trunks, rock cavities, garden sheds and hutches. Only occasionally will they venture indoors.

True, if picked up between finger and thumb, they will bite. So treat them gently and they will continue keeping down mosquitoes and houseflies. If you feel you have to move one, cover the spider with a glass tumbler, slide a piece of card underneath and let it go in the compost bin, woodpile or shed. Don't bother with anti-spider sprays, scented candles or essential oils.

And remember, if a headteacher were to close a school because they'd seen a few bumblebees in the playground, they would risk becoming a laughing stock. Children are more likely to be bitten by each other than by a spider.

Richard Jones is the author of House Guests, House Pests (Bloomsbury £9.99); bugmanjones.com

HOW TO... BOOK A REMOVALS FIRM

It's that "Oh my God" moment. You're moving house, but you've forgotten to book the removals firm — an understandable omission after the trauma of dealing with the estate agent, the knife-edge nerves of the price negotiation and having to push a slow conveyancer every step of the way.

Yet it's unwise to let hiring the vans slip, especially in peak moving months (September-November and May-July). It's also crucial that you don't allow haste to tempt you into booking a maverick firm, which will only add to your worries on moving day.

CAN'T I DO IT MYSELF?

You can hire your own van, of course — but only if the job is small. Do you have friends you hate enough to help you shift those sofas down the narrow staircase? Unless you are moving from a room in a flatshare or your home is the size of a shoebox, you probably need to hire professionals.

HOW DO I FIND A COMPANY?

Firms such as Anyvan.com offer different-sized vehicles and just one or two workers, ideal for small-scale moves or for taking care of a special item such as a piano. For the big boys with the biggest trucks, your first port of call should be the British Association of Removers (Bar), the main trade body, which has a search facility on its website (bar.co.uk). You'll almost certainly have a choice of several local firms, as well as big companies that can serve any part of the UK.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THEY'RE ANY GOOD?

It's all down to research. First, check independent reviews on the firms' websites and third-party review sites such as Feefo.com and Trustpilot.com. And visit trustedtraders.which.co.uk, which checks the credentials of the companies listed.

Second, find out from firms how long they have operated — long histories suggest experience and repeat business. Ask for references and insist on speaking to real clients, rather than relying on anonymous website testimonials.



You should also check out removers' insurance: Bar members should have policies covering damage and compensation. Ask for details of individual item thresholds (typically £10,000) and total loss limits (usually £50,000). If you have especially valuable or fragile items, you may need special cover — and check that the firm has moved such items in the past without trouble.

One more thing: find out what vehicles the firm uses. It might sound silly, but if you're on a narrow street, you'll want them to be able to get close to your home in

case it rains on moving day. If you have a large amount of furniture, you'll want big trucks — multiple small ones cost more because they require additional drivers. Unless you have off-street parking, factor the price of getting a parking suspension into your costings — not to mention the time it will take to secure such a suspension from the council.

NOW CAN I GET QUOTES?

Yes — and get at least three. Firms say that about half of their customers ask them to pack, too. Ask for each quote as a written schedule setting

agent handling your new home may not give up the keys until late on moving day — will this mean your belongings are left in a truck overnight? If so, where, and how much will the delay cost? Check all reasonable scenarios and ask how moving firms have handled problems in the past.

For each firm you invite to pitch, the consumer group Which? recommends writing a brief that includes details of any items requiring special packing, including pictures, antiques and valuable objects; any items that require dismantling, such as wardrobes or beds; especially hard-to-move items like pianos; any carpets and curtains that are being moved; and a floorplan of the new property, so boxes can be put in the correct rooms when unloading.

It's also crucial that you ask what happens if there's a delay in the conveyancing process. If there's a problem transferring funds, the estate

agent handling your new home may not give up the keys until late on moving day — will this mean your belongings are left in a truck overnight? If so, where, and how much will the delay cost? Check all reasonable scenarios and ask how moving firms have handled problems in the past.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

Each property and move is unique, but size does matter. According to Which?, removals from a typical three-bedroom house will cost £800, plus £250 for packing; for five bedrooms, you're looking at £1,200, plus £400. There are extra costs for long-distance and multi-day moves.

THAT'S IT. I'M READY TO GO...

Almost, but factor cleaning the home you're leaving into the time frame; and, if in doubt, arrange cleaners at the new place before you move in. Some removals firms will do this for an extra fee, or you could ask the estate agent you buy from for a recommended company. Happy moving day!

Graham Norwood



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