

## TOP TIPS

### GET RID OF LIMESCALE

#### TREATMENT

Fill the kettle with a mix of half white vinegar and half water; soak overnight. In the morning, the limescale will come off easily. Rinse thoroughly to remove vinegar odour; boil fresh water after treatment. Or buy a chemical descaler: check if they are suitable for a metal or plastic kettle first. Quickshine Kettle Descaler Sachets (£4 for three; lakeland.co.uk) can be used on all kettles, and are environmentally friendly. You should descale every four to eight weeks. Don't let scale build up, as it's harder to remove after a long time. Big deposits may need repeat treatment.

#### PREVENTION

To prevent future build-ups use a kettle protector, such as the Dunelm Kettle Descaler (£2; dunelm.com), a stainless-steel wire ball that attracts deposits away from the base and sides. Rinse and squeeze each month to clean.

[goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute](http://goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute)



## READERS' CLINIC

To stop bin liners clinging to the bin, spray the inside of the bin with Pledge Clean It Multisurface Cleaner, wipe off and polish with microfibre cloth. It makes the inside of the bin slippery and helps with pulling the bag out.  
**Peter Cunningham**

Squirt white vinegar on both levels of the dishwasher before putting it on. The glasses and cutlery will come out shiny.  
**Maria Dew**

My area was infested with chafer grubs. A neighbour paid £3,000 to replace her lawn. I found a 1 sq ft patch on mine looking strange. I dug it up and found chafer bugs. In fury, I poured bleach over them. It killed the chafers. The grass took a while to recover, but did I feel satisfied!  
**KT, Suffolk**

**Future question** Is it worth the bother of staining wood decking?

Send your tips, tricks and questions to [homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk). Advice given without responsibility



# HOME HELP

Worried about Asian hornets or how to replace broken stone steps? Our team have the answers

**I own the top flat in a three-flat building. Each flat is leasehold and the three owners are directors of the company that owns the freehold. The maintenance of the building is clearly spelt out in the freehold company charter, but this has been ignored. There is damp everywhere, there are leaks and the gutters and a flat roof need replacing. My co-owners prefer to wait for the apocalypse rather than make any repairs now. How can I enforce the terms of the freehold, which call for maintenance?**  
**MKK, London**

**A** Check the freehold company's articles of association to understand the process that needs to be followed. It is unlikely you could make decisions on behalf of the company on your own, and at least majority board approval is likely to be required. You could try to convene a board meeting and convince your fellow directors that proper maintenance now will save costs in the long run.

You may also have a remedy against the company as a minority shareholder, but this requires an application to court that might be expensive and uncertain. In your capacity as a leaseholder, you could make an application to the first-tier tribunal for the appointment of a manager under Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987. This requires a preliminary notice to be served, and you will need to prove one of the statutory grounds, the most common of which is that the freehold company has failed to comply with its obligations under the lease. If appointed, the manager will take his or her authority directly from the tribunal: he or she will not need the directors' approval to manage the property.

The threat of this application might be enough to convince the other flat owners to come to the table. If not, you should get legal advice about the procedure, which can be technical.

*Ed Cracknell, senior associate Russell-Cooke; [russell-cooke.co.uk](http://russell-cooke.co.uk)*

**The stone steps leading to my 10-year-old house are breaking away. They have already been replaced once, with the wrong stone. What stone do I need, and who should I get to do it?**  
**Jennifer Campbell**

**A** We recommend natural stones such as York, Portland or Moleanos, a Portuguese limestone. Check with your supplier if they have a CE marking and are fit for purpose. We advise a minimum of 30mm thickness for frost resistance, but ideally 40mm or 50mm. Stones must be fitted using the appropriate method for the substrate they are being adhered to. There must be no cavities under the stone; treads must be laid to allow water to drain. Don't seal external stones: allow them to harden naturally. Contact the Stone Federation for a list of companies in your area. Tell them what you are doing; they will know who is best suited.

*Gary Walters, managing director of Stone Age, experts in stone and porcelain; [stone-age.co.uk](http://stone-age.co.uk)*

## PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

### PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS ARE SET TO EXPIRE. IS IT OK TO START MY EXTENSION?

**I have plans to build a single-storey 3.5-metre extension. I am allowed to do so under permitted development (PD) rights, valid until May 30, 2019. PD stipulates that the work must be completed by this date. We have obtained prior approval, but we haven't yet got a builder in place, so will not be able to achieve this deadline.**

**Do you know if the date is likely to be extended again, or what we can do? I understand we will need to put in a fresh application under the full planning process if not completed by the date stipulated. We are currently, therefore, in limbo, as I'm sure many of your readers are. What do you advise?**  
**John Finney, London**

**A** The government introduced a new form of permitted development in 2013, allowing homeowners to extend their homes to the rear by up to six metres at ground-floor level (eight metres for detached houses). Applicants do not need to apply for full planning

permission, but must submit a much simpler "prior approval" application. If neighbours do not object to the proposal, it is permitted development and may proceed.

Permitted development rights are set out in the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO), which says these "larger home extensions" must be completed (ie approved and built) by May 30, 2019. This cut-off date is now looming. The government says it intends to make the larger home extension scheme permanent, likely through an amendment to the GPDO in April or May. It also intends to introduce a small fee for new applications, which are currently free. It is likely that existing approvals will be safe (the May 2019 deadline may just be removed or extended), but we won't know for sure until the amendments are published.

Although lots of people are merrily submitting new applications and starting work on larger home extensions, we recommend homeowners hold off until we know the scheme is being renewed. If it is not, and you are in breach of planning, you might have to demolish it. That's the worst-case scenario. It is likely you will be able to go ahead with this extension, but a little later in the year than planned.

*Martin Gaine, founder, Just Planning; [just-planning.co.uk](http://just-planning.co.uk)*

**We live in a 1980s house, with a high horizontal window in the living room. How do we furnish it?**  
**Laurence Duchemin**

**A** If you have midcentury furniture, you could go for a slim micro-mini blind for a retro look. But I hate blinds. If you must have them, a roman blind in a white fabric is the least offensive, or a timber slatted blind, painted white. Curtains will soften the space, with a sheer liner to show the window. But I'd leave it plain like Le Corbusier did.

*Dara Huang, founder, Design Haus Liberty; [dhl Liberty.com](http://dhl Liberty.com)*

**Should we be worried about the Asian hornet?**  
**T Atkins, via email**

**A** Yes. The oriental hornet, *Vespa velutina*, arrived in Bordeaux in 2004 in crates from China. It has since spread throughout Europe and the Channel Islands. Its danger comes, not from stinging humans (its sting is no worse than our hornets) but from its attacks on honeybees (France

has reported big losses) and solitary bees, which are key pollinators. Sightings should be reported to the Non-Native Species Secretariat ([nonnative-species.org](http://nonnative-species.org)), so nests can be destroyed. There is an app for reporting and identifying (Asian Hornet Watch). Between 2016 and 2018 there were 13 sightings in Britain. *Vespa velutina* is slightly smaller (workers to 25mm long) and much darker (sometimes almost all black) than our native orange/brown hornet, *Vespa crabro*, with yellow feet. It makes exposed paper carton nests hanging from trees and bushes, or in ornamental plantings, so is more likely to be disturbed by humans. It defends its colony vigorously – only professional pest control should try to remove a nest.

*Richard Jones's new book, Wasp (Reaktion Books), is out in August; [bugmanjones.com](http://bugmanjones.com)*

### 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