



HOME HELP

Stressed by spider webs, or need to jazz up a plastic plant? Ask our team

Q We have two electricity poles in our garden and receive a “wayleave” payment of £26 a year. Recently, we have received letters from surveyors offering to negotiate a new agreement with UK Power Networks for a 20% fee and implying that a deal could be worth thousands of pounds. Now UK Power Networks has sent a letter out of the blue offering a fixed-term wayleave for five years for about £500. Has there been a change in the law about wayleaves? What should we do?
Pat Bagshaw, via email

A Electricity suppliers have a statutory right to install and keep power lines on private land. This is achieved by the company applying to the secretary of state for business, energy and industrial strategy for a wayleave if the parties cannot agree one. This is an agreement giving permission for equipment to be kept on the land, and usually runs for a fixed period of time.

I am not aware of any recent change in the law, but your wayleave agreement may have expired. This gives you the opportunity to negotiate a new rate of payment. A specialist surveyor could help you to achieve a suitable amount. It is likely, but not guaranteed, that they would negotiate a higher price than you could on your own. Study the surveyor's terms, make sure you understand what they will do and compare them to other firms' terms and quotes.

In high-value negotiations, it would be sensible to instruct a solicitor, but in this case it does not look as though this would be economical.

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

Q The walls at the back of our house are covered in spider webs. We clean every day, and even spray the walls and patio doors with spider repellent, but to no effect. The webs come back and we can't keep the walls and doors clean.
S Taneja, Surrey



PROBLEM OF THE WEEK WHO MUST PAY TO REPLACE MY BLOCK'S CLADDING?

Q I am the owner of a flat on the 14th floor of a 16-storey tower block built in 2010. We recently received a letter from the managing agent saying that since the fire safety regulations were revised in 2018, our cladding is no longer safe or compliant and must be removed. The building has high-pressure laminate (HPL) cladding, and the columns and balconies are insulated render — both fail Advice Note 14. I'm aware of the government's £200m fund to replace aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding, but we aren't eligible because we don't have this kind of cladding. Although it was the developer that signed off the building as “fit for human habitation”, I suspect that leaseholders will end up paying for it — at a cost of up to £80,000. What can I do?
Irene Goodfellow

A After the Grenfell Tower tragedy, cladding that may have been in line with old regulations is now being examined to see if it complies with new, more stringent rules. Your

cladding may no longer be compliant, even if it was when it was built. If that's the case, legally it has to be changed; in most cases, leaseholders are liable for the costs. But this depends on the wording in leases. There have been rare instances where landlords, recognising the burden on their tenants, have paid for the removal of cladding as a gesture of goodwill.

HPL cladding and insulated render can fail the government's Advice Note 14, updated in December 2018, which covers external walls that do not incorporate ACM. Unsafe cladding

also affects leaseholders who are trying to sell their flats, because lenders will not finance the purchase of a flat that has non-compliant cladding. If you want to challenge your landlord, I recommend getting in touch with an experienced property litigator.

Some developers have capitulated in the face of the inevitable reputational damage and offered to cover the cost. For example, Lendlease is paying £5m to replace cladding on two tower blocks in Manchester. So the lesson here is to gain traction by attracting as much media and political attention as possible. A good starting point would be to refer the matter to your MP and your local newspaper.

Daniel Stern, partner, Slater Heelis; slaterheelis.co.uk

A I don't quite get the idea that garden spider webs are dirty and need to be cleaned or repelled. The garden spider, *Araneus diadematus*, has a yearly life cycle, so eggs that hatched in April are now mature spiders. Their webs are now obvious across bushes (and walls), and they are a miracle of biological engineering. The liquid protein polymer hardens as it is stretched in the air, and is stronger than steel. One web can support a spider 4,000 times its weight.

After birds, spiders may be the most important insect predators, catching flies, aphids, wasps, sawflies and grasshoppers. They are part of the balance of nature and gardeners should respect them for keeping down pests. It can be a bit of a shock walking through a web on the garden path, so swing a broom in front of you as you walk. Elsewhere, though, let spiders live and thrive. They are the reason you are not bitten to distraction by mosquitoes every night.

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

Q I have an expensive faux plant. It lives in my sunny conservatory and over two years has changed colour, so it looks synthetic and unreal. How do I restore its original green shade?
Eileen Engelmann

A Use a good spray paint to put the colour back. We recommend Rust-Oleum — it's a good-quality brand with an excellent colour selection. As a rule of thumb, spray with a primer first to make sure the top coat's colour adheres properly. Be sure to mask the area around the plant and the parts you don't want to paint, leaving only the leaves exposed. Spray outside if you can, and wear a mask. Light, even strokes with the paint are best, but follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Wayne Perrey and Steph Bron, founders of thediydoers.com

● If you want to know where to stash your cash, ask our readers. Last week, in response to advice about where to park your money safely between selling up and buying a new house, a few of you pointed out that the Financial Compensation Services Scheme protects temporary high balances in bank accounts of up to £1m for a maximum of six months. Thanks for the tip — clearly we're now a nation of nervous sell-to-renters.

DO YOU NEED HELP FROM ONE OF OUR EXPERTS?

Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility

THE BEST... BLENDERS



WINNER
Ninja Smart Screen Vacuum Blender CT660UKV, £149; amazon.co.uk 95/100

This top-scoring blender vacuum-seals ingredients before blending to make smoothies taste better and last longer. It remains stable in use and earned high marks for its blending abilities: it chopped and crushed quickly and effectively, and handled harder ingredients with ease, only losing marks for splashing when making mayonnaise. It has eight speeds and dishwasher-safe attachments. It's a bit bulky, though.



RUNNER-UP
Vitamix E310, £349; johnlewis.com 93/100

Scoring near-perfect marks across the board for performance, this machine handled even the most troublesome ingredients with ease. It chopped nuts evenly and made breadcrumbs in an instant. The design is hefty and heavy-duty, but it's simple to use and the attachments are dishwasher-safe. A strong performer, but pricey.

goodhousekeeping.com/uk/product-reviews

WHAT CAN I DO WITH ALL MY EXTRA PLASTIC BAGS?

J Neave, London

Jane Clarke, via email

Donate them to your nearest food bank. Search for one at trusselltrust.org.

Sophie and Ian, southwest London

We give ours back to Ocado when they deliver food. You get 5p per bag.

Judith Wallace, north London

Many supermarkets recycle plastic bags. I put mine in a collection bin at Waitrose.

Jean O'Flynn, Lincolnshire

Charity shops welcome them. They are used to package and wrap bric-a-brac.

Reader's tip of the week

To stop bugs entering a conservatory, put a few drops of pure tea tree oil in a bowl by the door or a window. They hate it.

Judith, via email

Future question

My husband leaves drops of urine by the lavatory. How can I stop this problem?

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

TRIED AND TESTED

READERS' CLINIC