

HOME HELP

DRIPPING YARN

Q We live in a house on the cliffs of Cornwall that is exposed to prevailing southwesterly gales. It was built in 1974. More than 20 years ago we converted what was a flat over garages into a full residence. During gales there is a significant leak from the first floor to the ground floor where the wall adjoins the balcony. There is a rolled-steel joist in the ground-floor ceiling, along which water ingress appears to run before dripping to the room below. Over the years, a number of builders have tried to fix it, but the problem remains. When gales are forecast, we have to combat the ingress by laying trays, towels and plastic sheets beneath the leak to absorb the water. The problem is intolerable. What is the solution? *Desperate, Fowey*

A Water often travels a fair way across flat surfaces such as ceilings before it finds an outlet. That means water ingress may not be close to the area where the leak comes into the room. The best solution would be to obtain quotes from qualified surveyors for an intrusive survey, probably of the area below the balcony, to ascertain where the water is coming in and how to stop it happening. Once this is known, a schedule of repairs can be prepared. You should obtain three quotes from surveyors who are members of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), then pick the one you feel is the most professional or the one with whom you are most comfortable. Once the scale of the work has been established, they may be able to oversee a tender process for the contractor offering the best quality and value. The surveyor should then be able to work with the selected contractor to ensure the repairs are carried out correctly and to a good standard of workmanship.

Marc Redshaw, construction director, Roberts Miller Redshaw; member, Federation of Master Builders (fmb.org.uk)



ANDRIY POPOV/ALAMY, SUSAN NEDERHALL/GETTY IMAGES

NEED HELP FROM OUR EXPERTS?

Coronavirus has put the housing market into lockdown. Buyers, sellers, landlords and tenants now face an unprecedented and challenging time. Let us know the questions you want answered by emailing homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. For the latest analysis and advice, go to [timesonline.co.uk](https://www.sunday-times.co.uk/timesonline.co.uk)

Water torture
A leaky ceiling is making one reader's life 'intolerable'

As of March 27, the government website stated: "No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless it is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repairs." Surveyors are advised to stop carrying out "non-urgent surveys in homes where people are in residence".

WEEVIL GENIUS

Q I'm making bread, but only have bread flour that is a year out of date and has weevils. If I sieve the flour for them, can I use it? *Brenda*

A Your photo shows the biscuit beetle, *Stegobium paniceum*. Picking out one or two of these tiny (2mm) cylindrical insects would be fine. I must have eaten quite a few before I realised they were floating in the milk of my malted Shreddies some years ago, but even I wouldn't eat bread made from a severe infestation. Although the beetles would give more protein, their frass (droppings) might cause an allergic reaction – think of people who are allergic to dust mites. I recently found some wholemeal rye bread, the surface of which was crawling

with flour lice (*Liposcelis bostrychophila*). There was a distinct ammoniacal smell from their excretions. Yuck. Captain Cook encouraged beetles to leave the ship's biscuits alone by placing the latter in an oven for a few minutes – but they still tasted of "spirits of hartshorn", as ammonia was then called. You will now need to check everything else in the cupboard: bread, biscuits, pasta, porridge, breakfast cereal, dry cat food, stock cubes. Sort, sift or clear out. Your tins and jars should be fine, though.

Richard Jones, author of *House Guests, House Pests: A Natural History of Animals in the Home* (Bloomsbury £8.99); bugman@jones.com

DRIVEN UP THE WALL

Q I live in a Victorian terrace of five houses. Our kitchen wall is only single-skin, but my neighbours have declared that they own 50% of it. They are doing some work on their side of the wall that I fear might negatively affect the structure of my home. I have deeds that date to 1867, when the house was built, and cannot find anything saying they own half. But they have deeds from 1948 that include the following quote in ancient legalese: "also all that the one undivided moiety or equal half part or share of and in the wall dividing the same from the adjoining house [my house] on the south side."

I have contacted the Land Registry, but it says the drawings of the property boundaries are crude and there is no decisive information.

How can someone own half of my kitchen wall? Name withheld

A Disputes about who owns what land arise regularly. When trying to understand where boundaries lie, a landowner frequently starts with the Land Registry plan. Yet such plans are usually not determinative of the precise legal location of a boundary. Instead, should this dispute require legal action, the court would look at the deeds, and in particular the first transaction that split up a plot. These often give quite detailed descriptions of what was being conveyed, either in words or by reference to a plan with detailed measurements on it. Particular features might be referred to.

The deed your neighbours have found will need considering in full, including its plan, to make sure the words you have quoted relate to the wall you are concerned about. Deeds for the other houses in the terrace may offer clues that help to answer your question.

If the wall concerned is in shared ownership, then it could be a party wall. If so, it will be much easier for your neighbours to construct an extension to their house and make use of that wall. The Party Wall Act 1996 would probably apply. While this facilitates work, it can also give you some protections.

The act can sometimes apply even if work is not being done to the party wall itself. Your neighbours might have to get planning permission or some other consent first. There may also be other relevant legal issues.

Jason Hunter, partner, Russell-Cooke; [russell-cooke.co.uk](https://www.russell-cooke.co.uk)

READERS' CLINIC

HOW CAN I MAKE MY TOWELS FEEL SOFT AND FLUFFY AGAIN?

Edward Davis, retired linen draper, Gloucestershire
Do not use fabric softener: this puts goop on fibres and reduces absorbency.

Hard towels usually soften after the first use, but be careful when buying. Plain colours are best. Buy the highest quality you can afford – at least 525 or 550 grams per square metre – and get Egyptian or pima cotton. Wash the towels before first use at 40C, no hotter, and line-dry them. Don't clean too often: aim for three or four uses between washes.

GKV

Measure how much washing product you put in, then reduce it – most people use far too much. Add less or no fabric conditioner, and dry outside. Pop in the dryer for 10 minutes with wool balls.

Ian McCarthy

Wash with a small cup of vinegar added to detergent.

@the.joguy

Wash in the machine with just water, then tumble-dry with tennis balls.

@lifeatthebungalow

White vinegar in the softener section. Don't use softener. Tumble-dry.

FUTURE QUESTIONS

● I may have to self-isolate soon. Apart from tins, rice and pasta, what fruits, vegetables, breads and other foods last longest without going off?
● What is the best way to disinfect your phone without damaging it?

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



wood going silver, oil it. And if money is no object, the Modern Garden Company has some amazing stuff, including the Kos adjustable sunlounger in teak (£1,950; [moderngarden.co.uk](https://www.moderngarden.co.uk)).

Harriet Parsons, landscape designer, [harrietparsons.com](https://www.harrietparsons.com)

Read Home next week for our ultimate guide to outdoor furniture

FLOW COACH

Q Our hot water is heated by an immersion tank in the airing cupboard upstairs. When running a hot tap downstairs, it takes ages for the water to get hot, which is wasteful as well as annoying. The pressure from the hot tap is also low. Is there any way to solve this without spending a fortune? *RK, Hampshire*

A This is a common problem. My house is the same: it can take 20 seconds before I start getting hot water from the kitchen tap.

It's all down to the length of the pipe between the tap and the hot-water cylinder. Unfortunately, it's not easy to solve: the hot water simply has to travel down the pipe, displacing the cold water that is already in it. If the pipe is accessible (mine's not), it can have thick insulation put on it to retain the heat once it's warm, but this is usually impractical – they're rarely easy to get to.

You could have an undersink water heater fitted, so the hot water is close to the tap, but then you'll be paying to heat two lots of water, so that's not going to save anything.

To be pedantic, the poor "pressure" will actually be poor flow (in litres per minute). Assuming the flow in all the other hot taps is okay, you need to check whether the undersink isolator valve on the tap's hot pipe is partly closed (if fitted).

If there's no isolator, or if it's fully open, a modern tap could be the problem: many have flexible connectors underneath the sink with a small bore. Replacing the tap with one meant for a low-pressure system will allow more water through, as these have large-bore hoses.

Sometimes the flexible tap connectors have little filter gauzes built in, which can become blocked. Usually they need to be really bad to affect the flow, but that's another (remote) possibility.

Joe Greaves, owner, Paveway Plumbing, Leicester; [pavewayplumbing.co.uk](https://www.pavewayplumbing.co.uk)

A ROOM WITH NO VIEW?

Q I live on the top floor of a block of flats. I bought my flat three years ago and one of its best features is the view of the river. The government recently

and the Arosa bench (£1,390). Harrod Horticultural has just released a range of high-grade steel furniture, including the three-seater Southwold bench (£595, [harrodhorticultural.com](https://www.harrodhorticultural.com)). It also has the Appleton pine bench for £349. Barlow Tyrie has a good range of teak furniture, including teak Adirondack reclining chairs (£980, [indian-ocean.co.uk](https://www.indian-ocean.co.uk))



IMAGE FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY. GETTY IMAGES

Can a neighbour own half of one of your walls?

announced plans to allow homeowners to build additional floors on to their property without seeking planning permission, and I've heard that a neighbouring block is investigating the possibility of extending upwards by two floors.

This will block my view of the river and limit the amount of natural light that enters my flat. What legal options might be available to me to stop the development? Anonymous

A I understand your concern. There is no legal right to a view, but it may be possible to bring a claim against the owner of the neighbouring block if you can establish that you have a type of easement known as a "right to light", and that the proposed extension would reduce the amount of light coming into your flat below a certain threshold.

Last year the government announced that rules would be introduced to allow extensions of up to two storeys without the need for planning permission. Right-to-light disputes commonly occur when such consent is not required – neighbours are not informed in advance of the possible obstruction during the planning process and their only recourse is to legal action. If successful, the claimant may be able to stop the obstruction and/or obtain compensation for the loss in value to their property.

A right to light is usually acquired by either an express grant or by "prescription" – if there has been uninterrupted use of the right for 20 years or more. Check whether your lease includes a provision stating that the original tenant was not granted a right to light.

It is not clear whether the windows in your flat have been there for more than 20 years. If you cannot establish a right to light, I'm afraid there may be little you can do to stop an extension of the block next door.

Jonathan Achampong, residential property partner, Wedlake Bell

READER'S TIP: ALTERNATIVES TO LOO ROLL

For the last word on this subject, I can only recommend the words of François Rabelais in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: "But, to conclude, I say and maintain, that of all torcheculs, arsewisps, bumfodders, tail-napkins, bunghole cleansers, and wipe-breeches, there is none in the world comparable to the neck of a goose."

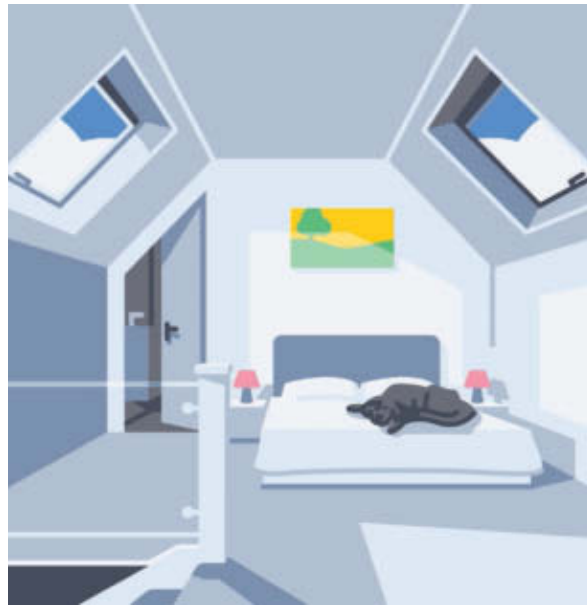
Vic Brown, Northumberland

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

High hopes, lofty ideals



A loft conversion lets you take things to the next level – but plan it carefully, advises **Carl Goulding** from MyBuilder.com



PETER HENDERSON

Converting your loft is a great way to expand your home, especially if you have a growing family. If your house's footprint is small and you can't extend into a garden, think about what's above your head.

Typically, there are two types of roof structure. The first is a truss construction with criss-cross beams more often found in modern housing. These don't lend themselves to loft conversions without very difficult or expensive alterations but check with your architect or contractor. The second is a purlin and rafter type – often found in prewar houses and well suited to lofts as they typically have less structural clutter and more head room.

But with any loft you can end up with odd shapes. You'll normally have skellings, where the pitched roof forms the walls, with short "ashlar" walls at the bottom. The obvious thing to do is to put Velux (or similar) windows in the skellings and, if you have the budget, a Juliet balcony or dormer window.

Next, think about where to put the staircase. Do you

sacrifice part of a bedroom? Should it run in an opposing direction to your current staircase? Many people don't consider the route to the loft but you'll need a dedicated stairwell and, at its top, a minimum 2m head clearance to comply with building regulations – plus a fire door to protect escape routes. Mostly, a loft is just one bedroom and – as you'll often

Consider the route to the loft and think about where you'll put the staircase – do you sacrifice part of a bedroom?

access it from one end – two bedrooms are optimistic. In terms of plumbing, consider at best an en suite shower room. But budget carefully as lofts can be expensive – anywhere between £25,000 and £80,000.

When it comes to selling, market the loft as an extra bedroom and, provided you have building control certification for it, you'll likely make your money back.

Not just any builder...

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