

**Q** I share a drive with my elderly neighbour. The sides are concrete and in good condition, but the middle metre or so is old stone and in bad condition – in fact, two people have tripped on it. My neighbour refuses to let me touch it. Do I have the right to do the required work, and what happens if there is an accident?

**MD, Beckenham, Kent**

**A** The answer will depend on a close analysis of your and your neighbour's title register and/or deeds. One common scenario is that each neighbour owns half of the driveway, and the deeds specify how it may be used. In a typical arrangement, each neighbour enjoys an express right of way over the other's part, but must allow the neighbour a right of way over their own section.

If your deeds do set out an express right of way, they might also stipulate who is to carry out repairs and how they are to be paid for. If they don't, then, although it might not be possible to compel your neighbour to do the work, you have the right to go onto their land, acting reasonably, to carry out repairs that are necessary to allow you to exercise your right of way. So, whether or not the old stone part of the driveway is within your ownership, you have the right to repair it at your own cost. If the neighbour prevents you from carrying out the work, you could probably apply to court for an injunction, assuming you have exhausted all attempts to resolve matters amicably. You would need to take legal advice in this case.

If someone were to sustain an injury caused by a poor state of repair, any liability would fall on the owner of the part of the driveway where the injury took place. That might be difficult to establish if there is no demarcation of the boundary – so all the more reason for you to take steps to ensure that the work is carried out.

**Ed Cracknell is a senior associate at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk**

**Q** Since the weather turned warmer, we have been invaded by ladybirds in our top-floor Edwardian flat. Do we have a nest? What can we do about it?

**Tom Parker, Clapham**

**A** Most likely, these are harlequin ladybirds (*Harmonia axyridis*), which enter houses for hibernation sites in late autumn. Early arrivals release a safety scent, which attracts others; huddling in masses is the way ladybirds deter predators, as it emphasises their colours and warns that they are poisonous to eat. You are finding them now because they have been roused by the arrival of spring but their chemical scent will linger after they leave, marking the nook or cranny as a secure location, and will attract the next generation later this year. Unfortunately, modern close-fitting replacement windows are the only way to keep them out. If you have old sliding sashes and the bugs are targeting one particular room, you might consider sealing those windows with tape in the autumn.

Some websites suggest dusting with pyrethroid insecticides, but this is a draconian and disproportionate response. If you find the ladybird clusters early, you can check the beetles outside and clean their potential overwintering sites with detergent or bleach to erase the chemical markers. The good news is that the ladybirds are harmless – unless, of course, they land in your tea, in which case they taint it horribly.

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

**Q** Do you need help from one of our experts? Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility.

**Q** I recently planted two eucalyptus trees, *E. gregsoniana*, the Wolgan snow gum, and *E. glaucescens*, the Tingiringi gum. Friends have since warned me to take them out, as eucalyptus roots damaged their home. Can I contain root growth? Should I replant in a pot?

**SM, Croydon**

**A** Eucalyptuses grow fast, and your Tingiringi gum has the potential to be a 60ft behemoth with enormous roots. In older homes built on clay, this can be a problem, as roots shrink and shift the soil, causing cracks in the brickwork; in modern homes built atop concrete, this isn't a problem. I keep my two eucalyptuses in check by regularly pruning into the crown and sawing out a third of the growth. This restricts the roots, but it's a job that needs doing at least twice a year, as eucalyptus grows so fast. For an easy life, stick with your Wolgan snow gum, which at just 20ft is a genuine dwarf, and ditch the Tingiringi – especially if you don't like ladders.

**Toby Buckland is a garden writer and the host of Toby's Garden Festival; tobygardenfest.co.uk**



## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

**Q** I had a wood-burning stove fitted last Christmas, but have just heard that woodburners need to meet new environmental standards. Does this mean that my stove isn't fit for purpose – and is it going to be harmful for me and for the environment?

**CD, York**

**A** First, it is important to note that clean-burning stoves aren't harmful to your health or the environment. In fact, they are playing an important part in reducing household emissions. Such stoves account for a really small fraction of emissions in the UK, and they provide an environmentally friendly heat source – particularly when compared with traditional open fires, which produce significantly more carbon emissions.

You say you had your stove fitted last Christmas, and our advice to customers is that they should be replaced every 10 years – meaning that yours is most definitely still fit for purpose.

It is also worth noting that you live in a smoke-control zone, so the stove you have installed will be "Defra-exempt", meaning that it meets the exacting air-quality standards demanded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Defra-exempt stoves have the latest technology to reduce emissions, adding air at the top of the firebox to ensure the fuel is burnt as efficiently as possible.

Despite the already strong green credentials of woodburning stoves,

the industry continues to take robust measures to improve the environmental performance of its products. That is why the Stove Industry Alliance (SIA), the trade body for the industry, is leading manufacturers to meet stringent new green laws six years ahead of schedule.

From this spring, the industry's main manufacturers will ensure that all newly designed woodburning stove models meet European environmental standards for particulate emissions, which are not due to be enforced until 2022. This will ensure that British stoves are more environmentally friendly than they have ever been, putting the industry at the cutting edge of European standards.

The main focus of the programme is the launch of an "SIA-approved" stamp to let consumers know their purchase meets Ecodesign standards. From later this year, you should look out for this stamp when buying a woodburner – our research shows that stoves meeting this standard produce 90% less emissions than open fires.

You can find an approved installer in your area by entering your postcode on the Hetas website, hetas.co.uk. The Guild of Master Chimney Sweeps recommends that the flue be swept quarterly when the stove is lit; at the very least, it should be swept at the start of the heating season.

**Dennis Milligan is a spokesman for the Stove Industry Alliance; stoveindustryalliance.com**

## TOP TIPS

**Stock up your kitchen cupboards with these stain-busting tools and you'll be ready to tackle any stain or spillage**

**Blunt knife** For gently scraping off solid parts of the stain before treating.

**Clean toothbrush and nailbrush** Use these to brush off talcum powder or conifer sprinkled over an oily stain to absorb it. Use a soft brush on delicate fabrics. Old toothbrushes are also perfect for scrubbing nasty mould stains off grout.

**Cotton buds** Ideal for cleaning delicate items. Dab gently at a stain to lift it.

**Sticky tape** Amazing for lifting loose pollen, animal hairs or other dry debris off clothes and fabrics.

**Paper towels and cloths** Use white – not patterned – paper towels or clean, lint-free cloths to blot and soak up moisture in water-based stains.



**goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute**

Illustration: Russell Hemmings

# Home help

Whether you have a ladybird invasion or find yourself in a sticky situation with a gum tree, our experts are here to offer advice