

Q I have found a beautiful art deco vase online made from uranium glass, and I would like to give it to my mother, but I understand that it's radioactive. How safe is it? I have also seen some uranium ice-cream sundae glasses from the 1930s. Could you eat from these in the 1930s. Could you eat from these in the 1930s. Could you eat from these in the 1930s.

JG, London

A The use of uranium in glass goes back to Roman times as a mosaic dated to AD79 contains glass with 1% uranium oxide. More modern forms containing diuranate salts were popular from the mid-19th century into the art deco period. The uranium gives it a yellow or green colour and makes it glow under ultraviolet light. Levels range from trace amounts to about 2% by weight. A Geiger counter can show radiation above background levels from the glass, but it is generally considered harmless: the amounts are tiny. Our bodies are subject to more radiation every day, from gamma rays and from naturally occurring radionuclides in the ground. In fact, there's more radiation from potassium-40 inside our bodies than we could ever get from handling uranium glass. That said, I would not feel comfortable eating from uranium sundae glasses.

Judith Miller is an antiques expert. Miller's Collectables Handbook & Price Guide 2016-2017 by Judith Miller and Mark Hill is out now (Octopus £19.99)

Q We are moving into a house that has woodlice in it. Most rooms have dead ones around the edges, and they appear daily. I am sure they don't live on rotting wood? There's no sign of rot anywhere. Can you help?

J Blake, via email

A Our only terrestrial crustaceans, and always in danger of desiccation, woodlice shelter under rotten logs to keep moist, but come out to feed on leaf litter and other decaying plant material in the cool, damp night. Ironically, if it rains hard, they are in danger of drowning, this is when they seek shelter by creeping under the back door. They are accidental trespassers. But houses are ferociously dry: you are finding those that have succumbed to the aridity of central heating or air conditioning.

Your house is sound, but check the fit of doors and windows, air bricks, vents and loft eaves. You should also check outside for accumulations near the house: in flower beds, shrubs, pots, planters or creepers.

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

Q Our lawn is never dry, and turns into a quagmire when it rains. It's on clay, at the top of a hill, shaded by trees and 2ft above the entry level of the house, and is held in place by a stone wall. Can we provide drainage and reseed it?

Rory O'Connor, Sheffield

A Adding drainage to a lawn is a job that may require serious earthworks and can be expensive. It comes down to whether there is a place for the water to drain. If you have a pond or large border at a lower level, laying perforated pipes 2ft deep in the soil is the answer. These should form a tree shape connecting the outlet and the "trunk", with branches arranged in a herringbone pattern spreading from it, about 10ft apart. Cover with grit. As long as the pipes slope 1in per yard towards the outlet, water will drain.

A cheaper but less effective option is to dig lots of organic matter into the soil, then add a 2in layer of sharp grit and fresh soil on top before reurfing.

Toby Buckland is a garden writer and the host of www.tobygardenfest.co.uk

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 have just had blackout roller blinds fitted in my children's bedrooms, but they lie in light around the edges. What can I do?

GM, Berkshire

A The blackout material cannot go all the way to the edge of the roller blind because the fixing ends are located there, as well as the pull chain. This gap is typically about half an inch. One suggestion is to put up curtains as well, to cover that light edge. There is also a product called BlindSlides: long hanging cloth strips that block out the light (blindslides.co.uk). Readers who have not already fitted blinds could try buying ones with the mechanism mounted outside the window recess, which will allow the blind to cover the gap.

There are also companies that can fit cassette roller blinds, as seen in conservatories and hospitals. The sides of the blind run within a frame fixed to the inside of the window recess, eliminating the light bleed from the sides.

Stephen Zockoll is the director of 0800 HANDYMAN; 0800handyman.co.uk

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q I live in a semi-detached house. My neighbours have converted their rear ground-floor room into a gym and are running a personal training business from home. I can hear the running machine through the walls, and there are problems with cars parking outside the front of the house. Do they need any sort of planning permission to do this?

Adam Rodger, Harrow

A A residential dwelling house is classified as C3, whereas a gym is D2 (assembly and leisure). Everyone has a right to operate a gym for personal use within their home on the basis that it is ancillary to the main dwelling. The meaning of "ancillary" is a grey area, however. The idea is that it is incidental to the residential use and does not change the overall character of the property as a single dwelling. Therefore, provided the gym remains ancillary, planning permission is not required.

Whether the use of part of a property counts as more than ancillary is a matter of fact and degree. The council will ultimately decide. It will consider factors such as the type of activity and whether it is detrimental to the residential amenity of the neighbours and the character of the area; the extent of use; the hours of use; any disturbance to neighbours; notable increases in noise; and whether the business results in a marked increase in traffic or people calling in.

In order to assess whether the character of the dwelling has changed as a result of the personal training

business, the council will need evidence. In the first instance, you should contact the local

planning authority to explain what is happening. The more detail you can provide about the number of visitors and cars, the hours of use and the impact of the noise, the more inclined the council will be to take action. Get other neighbours' comments too, if possible.

Even if the council considers that the gym use is ancillary to the primary use as a dwelling, you should still keep a log of details as set out above. If the business grows and activities intensify, the council might be convinced to reconsider its decision in the future.

If the use of the gym is considered to be more than ancillary now, then the council should take steps to ensure that this is effectively controlled through enforcement powers. It is likely to do this by threatening action and/or suggesting a retrospective application for the part change of use. If the neighbour then tries to put in such an application for planning permission to halt the threatened enforcement action, you should object to this and invite your neighbours to do so as well. You should also discuss with a solicitor whether there are restrictive covenants that could be enforced to prevent the gym use, and/or whether the personal training business is causing an actionable private or statutory nuisance.

Alex Ground is a partner at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk



If you're in the market for a new kettle, read our reviews to help you choose the most energy-efficient, time-saving and easy-to-use model.

WINNER
Breville VKJ595 Spectra Illuminated Jug Kettle, 91/100; £60; currys.co.uk
Quick and quiet. If you live in a hard-water area, the built-in filter is handy. The illuminating kettle casing adds a sense of fun, but it's not ideal for large families, as it only holds a litre.

TOP TIPS

RUNNER-UP
Hotpoint Ultimate Collection Digital Kettle, 89/100;

£45; ao.com
As well as being easy on the eye, this digital model is straightforward and practical, with a three-litre capacity. It's accurate when pouring and has six heat settings (from 50C to 100C). There's also a useful "keep warm" setting, which maintains the desired temperature for up to an hour.



■ goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute

Home help

Whether you're worried about glowing glass or infuriated by next door's gym, our experts are here to offer advice