

# lifestyleHomes&Property

## DIY made easy – really!

As the credit crunch continues to spread doom and gloom across the country, more and more of us are looking at ways to save the pennies. Sylvia Marshall, DIY expert and professional home improver, gives us a simple, no nonsense guide to avoiding the call out charge...

DOES your pen quiver and your eyes bulge as the emergency plumber you've just called out tells you how much to write the cheque for? I know the feeling. Yet, despite the pain of waving goodbye to our hard earned dosh, nearly half the female population and 16 per cent of men steer clear of basic home improvements. DIY shouldn't be daunting, it should be fun. It should be achievable, for men and women. So leave the cheque book to gather dust, throw on some overalls and let these simple steps guide you through your plumbing needs, while saving you a small fortune in the process. Prepare to bask in the warm glow of knowing you can Do It Yourself...

You'd kick yourself if you knew that emergency plumber you just called out at more than the cost of the weekly shop was just running through some simple procedures that you could have mas-

tered yourself. In these credit crunch times, we could all do with knowing how to check our own floating ball, change our own washers and tennis ball our own paintbrushes (my personal favourite). Gobbledygook? Fret not, for all shall be revealed.

Let's step inside the bathroom. What have we here? A toilet flushing with too much or too little water? Don't despair, don't call a plumber, for you can do a little test and sort it out all by yourself.

The big white block behind the seat is known as the cistern. Yes yes, no one wants to know the inner workings of a toilet, but I often find once people have got over the fear, they're actually rewarded by knowing how it all works. Lift the lid on your cistern and you'll find a floating ball sitting in a small bath of water. Once you know what the ball is, what it does and how to adjust it, you're laughing.

If the cistern is overflowing it may mean the ball is damaged or the float arm attached to it needs adjusting. The float arm controls how much water is taken from the cistern to the loo during and after a flush, so if it's broken, it can't stop water coming in and that could be why you're getting overflow. Still with me? If the ball is floating lower in the water than about a third of its diameter, there's a good chance it's got a crack or hole in it.

Unscrew the ball from the float arm and shake it. If you hear water, pop to your local plumbing supplier and buy a new one. Take your old one with you and make sure you get the same type as they vary. Simple – and you've just saved yourself a £50 call out charge.

### Guide

Now, if the ball is floating fine and isn't damaged, there may be a problem with the floating arm. The floating arm should have a screw adjuster, unless it's a very old loo, in which case you'll have a metal arm which you can gently bend. You're nearly there – adjust the arm and the water level should remain below the overflow pipe. It's quite safe to check this by having a good flush. Watch the cistern fill up. If there is still a problem, you may need a new washer on the arm. That's slightly more complicated, but if you want to give it a go, there's a step by step guide on my website – [www.cosy-homesonline.com](http://www.cosy-homesonline.com)

Let's look at dripping taps. Everyone's got one. Each drip is like waving goodbye to a penny. And pennies add up, eventually, to holidays or new cars, so why waste them?

Taps drip because the washer has

worn out and the good news is, they're incredibly easy to replace. If you don't replace a washer, eventually the whole tap will need resealing, costing more money than the drip. So, it's worth it.

Turn off the water supply and remove the tap covering to expose the headgear nut. Use a cloth-covered spanner to unscrew the head, revealing the washer. If it won't budge, lubricate the nut with oil and have a cup of tea, then try again. Once the tap top is removed, you'll be able to see the washer. You may need to prise it loose of the tap, or it may come away easily. Replace the washer and reassemble the tap. Hey presto, no more drip.

As it's summer, let's go in the garden. We want it to look lovely for all those long summer bbq's, but brickwork can get dirty, especially if it's near a road, and stone patios can look worn. This little gem can be applied to your bathroom or kitchen tiles, any brickwork, or stone. For scratches on tiles, just take a spare tile, turn it upside down and rub it on the scratch. Miraculously, the scratch will disappear. Likewise, for stone and brick outside, just grab a similar stone or brick (must match like with like) and rub. Your brick and stone work will be back to their original colour in no time. Magic.

For an eco-friendly move, turn down your thermostat. No doubt you've heard people bang on about this before, but here's the logic: The average thermostat is set at 75°C. Yet we shower at 35°C. The dishwasher is set to 60°C and the washing machine to 40°C, or occasionally 60°C. So why have a boiler of too hot water, just waiting to be diluted? Turning it down to 65°C will save money on your electricity bills and help save the planet.

Sylvia Marshall



Don't be frightened of the inner workings of your toilet cistern

Here's some other little gems I've picked up along the way.

Toothpaste removes crayon marks from walls, a bin liner makes a perfect overall for messy work, and as for tennis balls... Cut in half and make a hole, then pierce your paintbrush handle through the hole. Ta-da! A perfect paint shield. If you still get the odd splatter of paint on your skin, a little olive oil will get it off in no time.

These are just some of my handy tips. We can all be a DIY expert, we just need the confidence and know-how to tackle our homes ourselves. It may seem daunting to the layman who's never held the cistern cover in their hands, but once you have, you'll get a sense of achievement you could never gain from writing that painfully expensive cheque to the plumber.

Now, where's that holiday brochure?



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