

ASK THE experts

Our team of experts answers your home-improvement questions



Q As the evenings are getting darker, how can I use light in my home to help make the space feel more cosy? *Zoe Cutler, Preston*

A *Marketa Rypacek, Managing Director at Industville, reveals...*

Use mood lighting to create a feeling of comfort, warmth, and relaxation. Approaching your lighting in a layered manner will create little pockets and pools of light to give a welcoming



Brooklyn Dome pendant light, £79 each, Industville

Photo @nigel.havers

atmosphere. A decorative light hung above a dining table, for example, will provide ambient light and define the dining space giving it a cosy, more intimate feeling. If you have an architectural feature or piece of wall art in the home, consider accenting it with wall lights for a subtle glow. Use warmer, lower-level lighting such as table lamps to create a snug, relaxed feel in any room. Embracing the full range of lighting sources available, from decorative pendants and wall lights to functional LED spotlights, will allow you to create a space that is both practical and welcoming.

Another tip is to use dimmer switches; they are a quick and cost-effective way of offering multiple lighting levels in a space, allowing you to set the tone and change the atmosphere of a room. For instance, you may prefer a low, dim light for a cosy feel during the evenings, but still require the option of full brightness in that room for everyday tasks such as cooking or cleaning.



Brooklyn copper glass funnel wall lights, £79 each, Industville

Q I've made flowerbeds in my garden for the first time this summer, how can I ensure they survive through the winter? *Shelley Townsend, Surrey*

A *Sarah Raven, gardening expert, says...* There are multiple things you can do to limit the damage that the winter's harsh weather, cold and frost can cause. Firstly – and counter-intuitively – don't tidy your flower beds too carefully. We find by leaving top growth on many families of plants, such as the salvias, penstemons and pelargoniums, they survive the winter better. Don't cut them down until April when the frosts are nearly over. The frosted top growth gives all-important winter and early spring protection.

I would suggest removing fallen leaves from borders and pots to prevent pests overwintering among the beds, so collect leaves and keep them in wire cages or leaf mould bags to rot down, which will produce useful soil conditioner.

Helleborus x ballardiae 'Maestro', £32.95 for a 4.5L pot, Sarah Raven

Portrait and main photo Jonathan Buckley

Q After 18 months of heightened cleaning, my carpets are looking worn. Is there such a thing as too much vacuuming, and how can I ensure my carpets don't lose quality over time? *Lizzie Ward, Southampton*

A *Rosie Clarke, Product Training Manager at Miele GB, explains...* While it is possible to create extra wear and tear on carpets by vacuuming excessively, on the whole, standard carpets can handle being vacuumed several times a week without issue. In fact, dirt itself can cause more damage to a carpet in the long run as if left it can build up at the base of the carpet fibres, creating an ideal environment for mites and bacteria.

In the average family home, it's advisable to vacuum high-traffic area such as hallways and stairs a couple of times a week (possibly more if you've got pets and small children treading dirt into the house) and all other areas at least once a week. However, for households with allergy sufferers for example, you may find it necessary

to vacuum a little more frequently. In order to prevent unnecessary wear on your flooring, it's important to ensure you are using an appropriate type of floorhead for the flooring type, and that for floorheads with both hard floor and carpet settings, you have the correct setting selected. If you're not sure, check the operating manual for your vacuum cleaner or speak to the manufacturer. Many manufacturers will also sell additional floorheads designed for different flooring types. It's a good idea to check the underside of your floorhead frequently to ensure there are no damaged areas or loose screws or fixings that could in turn cause damage to your carpet, and make sure to replace any floorheads that are damaged or worn.



Triflex HX1 Cat and Dog vacuum cleaner, £579, Miele



Q I want to update my kitchen cupboards. What are your top tips for tackling this as a DIY job? *Gemma Rawlinson, Sheffield*

A *Chris Webb, Merchandise Manager at B&Q, says...* When it comes to sprucing up your kitchen cupboards, something as simple as replacing your cabinet doors, door handles or some paint can make a huge difference in a kitchen. To replace the cabinet doors, line the door up to the cabinet and get somebody to help hold it in place while you attach the hinge arms to the hinge plate. Some hinges clip onto the plate and some are fixed by a screw so check the instructions to see which type you have and how to secure them properly.

For a modern update, swap the door handles to a chic nickel finish. Or you could refresh the cabinet doors with a lick of paint. Choose an interior emulsion for walls and ceilings as this paint is designed to withstand tough stains and moisture. Cool blues and tonal greys are currently popular kitchen shades and will lift your kitchen cupboards and make them look as good as new.



GoodHome Annatto brushed nickel effect steel bar cabinet handles, £6 for two, B&Q

Q It's been months since I've had any guests to stay over. How can I get my spare bedroom ready when guests visit? *Ben Wilson, Telford*

A *Suzy McMahon, Buying Director at Sofology, says...* When it comes to preparing spare rooms for impromptu guests it's worth beginning with the essentials such as furniture and storage and then introducing accessories and soft furnishings for colour and pattern. As a place to relax and unwind a spare bedroom should be kept as clutter free as possible so it can be ready at a moment's notice. Bedside tables are both practical and functional while also helping to add character to a space. Arranging a table on either side of the bed with similar scaled accessories will create symmetry in the space. Top with a lamp to provide dedicated light should guests want to read in bed.

For rooms that double up as offices or living rooms, a multifunctional sofa bed will create a comfortable sleep solution that can easily return to seating during the day. Measure the space around the sofa to ensure the area is large enough for when it's folded out and in use. Accessorise your sofa bed with textured cushions, plush rugs and table lighting to create a luxurious hideaway visitors won't want to leave.



WE NEED YOUR QUESTIONS!
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