The Chantarelle Handyman

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Don Freeman's
Tips and Techniques

Compiled by Helen Rowntree
March 2003

The Chantarelle Handyman Handbook

Explanation, History and Caveats

The Chantarelle Handyman Handbook was written and compiled by former Chantarelle residents Don Freeman and Helen Rowntree back in March 2003 as a do-it-yourself repair and maintenance manual for Chantarelle homes. At the time, the information was probably correct and current based on the level of expertise and hands-on experience of Mr. Freeman. Since then, Mr. Freeman has moved on and sixteen years have elapsed. Much has changed, not only in technology, materials, and practices espoused in the handbook, but also in the Chantarelle houses themselves. Some of the tips may no longer be applicable because of kitchen and bathroom remodeling, furnace and hot water heater replacements, installation of new garage doors and windows, and the like.

For example, on page 6, which refers to improving the look of the original oak cabinets, many houses may have had those cabinets replaced or repainted by now, so this particular instruction would no longer apply. On page 34, reference is made to a garage floor epoxy coating called Litex, which is no longer available (as far as we can tell). And there are a few references made to the installation, testing and maintenance of smoke detectors. Be aware that in California, carbon monoxide detectors are also required in houses. These are just some examples where the information may be dated.

So, please peruse and use the handbook with these caveats in mind.

Chantarelle Board of Directors
September 2019

The Chantarelle Handyman ~~~~~~~~~~ Don Freeman's Tips and Techniques

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Air Conditioners: Blowing a fuse

At least three or four residents that I know of had their air conditioners quit on them recently, and usually on the hottest day of the year. Each had a fuse problem—a problem you can easily correct yourself without having to pay for an electrician.

Outside your home directly above the air conditioner condenser is a gray fuse box. Inside is a black fuse block with a handle. It probably says "Main" on it. Pull the handle to remove the block. This effectively cuts off the power to the unit, and it is safe to do so provided you keep your fingers out of the empty hole.

The fuse block should contain two 40-amp time-delay cartridge fuses. Take it all with you to Friedman Bros and buy two more fuses. Be sure they are 40-amp and say Time-Delay. When an air conditioner comes on, it takes quite a surge of power to get it running. Normally, a time-delay fuse lets the unit reach its normal running rate without blowing.

Plug the fuse block with the original fuses back into your fuse box, being sure the word "Main" is upright. Leave the extras right there, loose in the box, so you'll know where they are when you need them. Should your air conditioner fail, the first thing I'd do is put in the new fuses. That might just solve your problem. Notice one end of the fuse is different from the other end. Be sure you put the new ones in going the same way.

Dolores DeVito had a similar problem except neither her air conditioner nor furnace would work. The furnace in the garage is plugged into a separate outlet. The outlet also has a 15-amp screw-in fuse. Should you have the same problem she had, unscrew the fuse to see if the wire inside is melted. If so, replace it with another 15-amp fuse and see if that corrects the problem. It did hers.

More unusual is a problem experienced by a few homeowners: the wires leading into the house from the air conditioner were chewed by rats getting into the crawl space. In this case, replacing the fuse didn't solve the problem as the bare wires were shorting out. The safest route to go in this case is to call an HVAC repairman.

In the next section, I have a more complete article on maintaining air conditioners, but I wanted to let you know about the fuses right away.

Air Conditioners: Maintenance

As with maintaining our furnaces, the most important thing is to change the filter frequently. The literature that Presley gave us on our air conditioners says to:

"Check the filter(s) every three to four weeks. Replace filter(s) when necessary, or clean the filter(s) if you have the reusable type."

The same filter serves both the furnace and air conditioner, so that simplifies things. A dirty filter puts the same strain on the air conditioner condenser as it does the furnace blower, and can cause premature failure. If you are using a reusable filter, the instructions say to be certain it is completely dry before reinstalling. They suggest you have two reusable filters so one is always available.

There is little to do in maintaining the outside condenser. In order to drain properly, grass clippings, leaves and other debris should be removed periodically from the base pan. Plastic covers made to fit our size condenser are available at Friedman Brothers. These are good for keeping the unit dry and clean during the winter months.

Look at your condenser outside. Three sides have grills that protect the coils. The fourth side is covered with a solid panel. Look through the top openings and you can see the bottom pan, with holes going around the edges. You can see how clean or dirty the pan is. If dirty, clean away as much debris from the holes as you can.

When the unit is running, condensed water drips from the coils to this pan and goes out these holes to the concrete slab and to the ground below. As long as water does not collect in the pan, it means the water is draining away properly.

Now is a good time to trim back shrubs from around the condenser that might restrict the free flow of air.

The coils themselves may need cleaning. The instructions suggest a soft brush or a vacuum cleaner with a soft brush attachment to clean the exterior surface of the coils. Caution: use great care for the fins are made of light-gauge aluminum and are easily damaged. It is not a good idea to squirt the coils with a hose for that might force the dirt in deeper between the coils and dry to a mud.

There is no mention in the instructions about having to lubricate the unit.

It is possible the concrete slab the coil is resting on has settled unevenly and is sloping. This means the unit is not level. This may interfere with the proper drainage of the pan. Mine does slope slightly, and always has, and I've let it be since the unit seems to drain properly and runs all right. If not, you can gently pry the slab level with a crowbar and level it with a few rocks.

Cabinets: Improving the look of your cabinets

Our oak cabinets in the kitchen and bathrooms are quite attractive and pretty well built. Unfortunately, it appears the cabinetmaker sprayed only one protective coat on them, which means they didn't hold up as well as they should have. If yours looks like mine did, you have white marks on the raw edges, fingernail digs, and scratches marring the finish.

I dreaded refinishing them but knew I had to do something. There are a couple of choices on making them look better, depending on how much effort you want to expend.

The easiest way is to touch up the worn spots. First, wash the cabinets thoroughly with a biodegradable cleanser such as Simple Green. The cabinets must be free of all grease. Non-biodegradable products such as TSP or Spic and Span leave a gritty film that has to be completely rinsed off. This doubles the work.

I touched up the worn spots with Minwax #209 Natural Wood Finish. It penetrates, stains and seals and does a remarkable job of covering up the blemishes. A half-pint is plenty available at Friedman Bros. I used a tiny paint brush like a child uses to spot those places that need touching up.

This alone made a tremendous difference in the cabinets appearance. You could quit right there. It would only take a half-day to wash the kitchen cabinets and spot them and they'll look noticeably better. Unfortunately, the original finish on the cabinets is satin. The Wood Finish has more gloss, which is evident if you look closely. But you'll probably be satisfied with the results.

I decided to go the distance and add two coats of Minwax Polyurethane Clear Semi-Gloss. Two quarts should do it. Use a good natural bristle brush rather than one with synthetic bristles. Lightly rub down the surfaces with a super fine 0000 steel wool after the first coat and even more delicately after the second coat.

The finished result looks quite nice and will last at least another ten years. It's a major job so why not break it up into smaller chunks? Do the bathrooms one at a time; divide the kitchen up into quarters. For a small amount of cash and some man/woman hours invested, you will have beautiful cabinets again.

Caulking: Tubs, showers, and sinks

We've all sold houses before and in many cases the termite inspector found dry rot around the tubs and showers, and occasionally the sink. It was quite costly to repair. Very likely, this could have been prevented by re-caulking every couple of years. How long has it been since you recaulked your tubs, showers, and sinks? Have you ever done it? It should be done every couple of years. Fortunately, it's quick, cheap and easy.

Caulk is a silicone or latex (possibly both) soft substance that is squeezed into the cracks around tubs, showers and sinks to keep water from seeping through. It is the white toothpaste-looking line where one surface meets another, where the tub or shower pan meets the floor, and where your sinks' splashboards meet the walls. Caulk hardens as it cures and provides a good water barrier. In time though it can become brittle and shrink back letting water get past. In some places in my home, the original caulk is white and in some places it is clear. That doesn't matter.

Friedman Brothers has caulk in cartridges or in tubes that look like a big toothpaste tube. You need a caulking gun to use the cartridge. If not, the tube works fine. I bought a tube of DAP Defender Bath Sealant. Be sure to get white.

The original caulk must be absolutely free of dirt and soap scum so the new caulk can adhere properly. First, be sure the room is well ventilated. Use a solution of either one part bleach to four parts water, or one part vinegar to four parts water, or a solution of water and water conditioner, such as Calgon. In any case, scrub the solution on, rinse thoroughly then dry with a soft cloth. An old toothbrush makes a good scrubber.

Cut the tip of either the cartridge or tube at an angle as marked on the tip. Make the hole as small as you can. You can always enlarge it if needed, but a hole that is too big makes a mess.

Holding the cartridge or tube at a 45 degree angle, squeeze it as you drag it along the first seam you wish to re-caulk. Have a paper towel handy to wipe the tip clean before starting the next seam. Drag your finger evenly along the seams pressing hard against the new caulk. This forces it into the seams and smooths out the new caulk. The tube I bought had a smoothing cap, but I found it easier to use my finger. Probably the most critical seam is where the tub or shower pan meets the vinyl flooring. Wait at least 24 hours before using the tub or shower to let the caulk cure.

Caulking, Revisited

In the previous section, I talked about the importance of caulking around tubs, showers and sinks and I gave some simple instructions for doing it. Since then, two neighbors told me of problems they'd encountered and I'd like to pass them on.

Item 1. Kay McHugh told me that they discovered a leak when they had their bathroom vinyl removed. They installed a special wood floor in their downstairs master bathroom (two-and-a-half bath model), and to do so, had to lift the original flooring. The subfloor next to the shower was wet. They traced the leak to the low wall separating the shower from the tub. The caulked joint where the short cultured marble wall meets the top of the tub had failed and let water seep through.

Fortunately, the leaking was recent enough that the subfloor was not severely damaged. They probably would not have noticed the problem if they had not removed the vinyl flooring. Again, it's a good idea to do some caulking, hopefully to prevent such a thing from happening to you.

Item 2. Our upstairs tub has the Presley-installed glass enclosure. When showering, an ounce or two of water collects on the vinyl floor next to the tub at the drain end. I've never been able to trace the problem—whether water splashes over the top of the enclosure, splashes out along the edge of the door, or underneath the door. I've thoroughly recaulked all the seams but water still manages to gets through.

Norman Bird told me he has the very same problem. Do others of you? Have you had any luck solving it? Let folks in the Chanterelle Homeowners Association know. Together, we ought to be able to lick this thing.

GFCIs: Testing your Grounded Fault Circuit Interrupters

A few weeks ago, a neighbor complained to me that a small appliance in the kitchen wasn't working. A few months earlier, another said they could not get anything plugged into their bathroom outlets to work. A similar bathroom problem was brought to my attention about a year ago. In all three cases, the diagnosis and solution took less than a minute. The Grounded Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) had somehow tripped and needed to be reset.

The GFC interrupter is designed to help prevent us from getting electrocuted, which can happen when water gets too near live electricity. The interrupter instantly shuts down the circuit when moisture somehow gets too close. Since this is most likely to happen near the kitchen sink, in the bathrooms, garage, and outdoor outlets, those circuits in our homes have GFCIs.

In your kitchen, find the outlet that has a red button and a black button. To test to see if the interrupter is working, press the black TEST button. The red RESET button should pop out. This should cut off the power at all the outlets on that circuit. You can check to see if the power is out by plugging a small radio into each of the plugs on that circuit. The radio should not work. That is good. The interrupter worked. Now press the red RESET button until it stays locked in. Your test is complete. Now do the same with the other GFCIs.

What is all this for? Leviton, the maker of our GFCI devices says, "This device protects you against hazardous electrical shock that may be caused if your body becomes a path through which electricity travels to reach ground. This could happen when you touch an appliance or cord that is 'live' through faulty mechanism, damp or worn insulation etc. You don't even have to be on the ground itself to be shocked; you could be touching plumbing or other material that leads to the ground.

"When protected by the GFCI, you may still feel a shock, but the GFCI should cut it off quickly enough so a person in normal health should not have serious electrical injury." The manufacturer goes on to say when testing the device, "CAUTION: If RESET button does not pop out . . .[or if radio plays on other outlets on that circuit, Ed]. . .do not use any outlets on the circuit. Call a qualified electrician." After all is said and done, these are the circuits where you are most likely to get a shock. Minimize the seriousness of those shocks by keeping the interrupter working. The manufacturer suggests testing once a month. I do it once a quarter.

Disaster Preparedness: Getting ready for "the Big One"

The Valley of the Moon Fire Department told us that in the event of a major disaster, we should be prepared to take care of ourselves for the first 72 hours. There are things each of us can do in our own home to make it safer. The Fire Department recommends the following:

1. Put together a basic home kit with enough basic equipment and provisions to last three days. A plastic garbage can works well. In it put:
   - one gallon of water person per day for three days
   - a gallon of bleach to purify domestic water
   - enough food to last a week
   - a camp stove, extra fuel and waterproof matches
   - cooking and eating utensils, including a can opener
   - paper plates and cups
   - plastic garbage bags
   - pet provisions
   - sanitation and hygenic supplies
   - a first aid kit
   - prescription medicines
   - eye glasses
   - a flashlight, portable radio and extra batteries
   - heavy clothes and rugged boots or shoes
   - a fire extinguisher
   - small hand tools
   - rope
   - sleeping bags
   - money.

It sounds like we're going camping! There are also things we can do to make our houses safer. These are separated out by room.

2. In the kitchen:
   - store heavy objects in lower cabinets
   - store all chemicals in a lower, secured cabinet - (secure a cabinet by installing "child proof" latches)
   - put guard rails on any open shelf to keep items from sliding off
   - secure with velcro tape fragile items that are on display
   - lock the wheels on your refrigerator and on other wheeled appliances.

3. In the bedrooms:
   - beds should not be under windows where falling glass could cut someone
   - move heavy objects (pictures or mirrors) away from walls at the head of a bed
   - put a flashlight and heavy shoes under each bed.

4. In the bathrooms:
   - install "child proof" latches on medicine cabinets to keep glass bottles from falling
   - move glass objects from open shelves to secured cabinets
   - store cleaning products and other chemicals in a lower secured cabinet.

5. In the rest of the house:
   - secure tall furniture to wall studs with nails or wire
   - secure TVs, computers and stereos to their shelves with velcro tape
   - be sure mirrors and heavy paintings are on secure hangers.

6. In the garage:
   - store heavy objects at floor level
   - secure objects on upper shelves, especially those near cars - (a simple guard rail should keep them in place)
   - keep hazardous materials in well-marked, unbreakable containers
   - store hazardous materials in a low cabinet with an earthquake-proof latch.

Sound like a lot of work? It is, but it could well be worth it. Anyone who has been through a good shaker can see where these measures could have prevented a great deal of damage and loss.

Disaster Preparedness: Turning off utilities in an emergency to minimize damage

When a major disaster, such as an earthquake hits, will you know how to turn off your gas, water and electricity? Chances are if these are disrupted, they will cause more damage to your home than the earth's movement will. Think back to the 1906 shaker that hit San Francisco. It was the gas-fed fire that caused the most destruction.

All three of our utilities are underground. The most likely to rupture when the earth moves are the water and gas lines, since these are rigid pipes. I would shut off the gas first. The Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) manual says, "Natural gas leaks can cause an explosive and flammable atmosphere inside a building. Fires that are fed by leaking gas should not be extinguished until the gas supply is shut off."

The gas line comes up out of the ground just outside the front corner of the garage—the corner next to the property line. The pipe comes up out of the ground, makes a few bends and goes into the gas meter. About a foot above where the pipe comes out of the ground, there is a valve with a blunt flat stem. The stem is in an upward-downward direction. You have to turn that stem a quarter turn so that it is perpendicular to the pipe. This cuts off the supply of gas to your house.

It will take a pipe wrench, channel pliers or a large crescent wrench to turn that stem. Some neighbors have hung such a tool just inside their garage door so they can go right to it in an emergency. Friedman Brothers has a tool for shutting off the gas, called an Emergency Gas Shut Off Wrench.

It might not be necessary to turn off the gas after every earthquake. It's a good idea to check the meter, though, even if you do not smell gas. If the unmarked wheels (wheels without numbers) are spinning, you have a leak and should shut off the gas. Do not turn the gas back on without checking with your neighborhood captain, or PG&E, if you can get through to them.

Fortunately, the water and electricity are easier to shut off. The electrical circuit breakers are in a recessed metal cabinet in a wall of your utility room. Open the door and flick all the switches to the off position. Unless your home has suffered severe damage, it probably isn't necessary to turn off the electricity.

Here are some clues that indicate you might need to do it:

- if the power goes off,

- if you can smell smoke,
- if you smell burnt insulation, which has a distinct odor,
- if the plates around your electric switches or plugs are blackened or are hot to touch.

Flipping off the circuits in your utility room is the easiest way to stop electricity flowing through your home's circuits. The most complete way is to flip off the main circuit in the breaker box outside your garage. The switch will be inside the metal door that is next to the electric meter. These are both near the gas meter.

The water main comes up to the house in one of many locations. On some homes, it is next to the gas meter and valve. That's the first place to look. On some homes, (many three-bedroom models) it comes up at the front wall of the kitchen. Wherever it surfaces, about a foot up the pipe is a gate valve with a circular faucet handle. Turn it clockwise until it will turn no more. This will stop all flow of water into your home.

There is another, but more difficult, way to turn off the water. Out in your front lawn is a sunken rectangular concrete box with the word "Water" on the lid. If you can lift the lid, there is a gate valve next to the meter. Again, turn it clockwise until it stops. Either valve will do the trick.

You should take the time now to locate your gas, electric and water sources and see how to go about turning them off.

Disaster Preparedness: Earthquakes

Imagine that today is Saturday. An earthquake of the magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale struck at 9:45 am. The quake was on the Rogers Creek Fault (a scant five miles west of Chantarelle) and was centered just north of Petaluma. It lasted 53 seconds.

Sonoma Valley has widespread damage. Fire, police, and paramedics are overwhelmed by the destruction. Roads and bridges have been severely damaged. All transportation routes into and out of the Valley are either blocked with debris and downed power lines or gridlocked because of vehicular accidents. Ruptured gas lines are feeding fires everywhere. Broken water pipes are spewing water all over the area. Help from the outside will be days in coming.

There is no telephone service in the Valley, nor power except for those facilities that have back-up generators. Chantarelle can expect no help from the Sheriff or Fire Department for at least 72 hours.

If this scenario sounds frightening, it should. Will you know the first things you should do if it does?

- If you are inside when the earthquake hits, try to get under something like a table or a desk that will protect you from falling debris and hold on tight. Try to stay at least 15 feet away from any window so you won't get cut by flying glass.

- If you can't get underneath something, get to the inner hallway, sit down on the floor with your back against a wall, and cover your head and neck with your arms.

- Never run outside during the quake. Most people are injured by falling debris.

- If you are outside when the earthquake hits, stay there. Move away from buildings to an open area like the middle of the street.

- Once the shaking stops, check out the other members of your household for injuries. Treat them as best you can.

- If there is an active fire in your house and it is smaller than a barrel, grab your fire extinguisher and put it out. If any fire is larger than a barrel, close the room door behind you and get out of the house immediately. Don't try to extinguish the fire.

- Assess the damage to your house. If there is damage and it is dark, do not flick on any light switches. If there is leaking gas, the spark from the light switch could cause an explosion.

- Assuming there is damage, turn off your gas, water and electricity. See the previous section in this binder to know how to do it.

- If there is excessive damage, also turn off the water supply valves underneath each toilet. Then turn off the water supply valve to your water heater in the garage. That valve is on top of your water heater and is cool to the touch. This will assure you of at least 60 gallons of potable water in case the VOM Water District water becomes contaminated.

Decks: Protecting your redwood deck

Sun, not rain, is your deck's worst enemy. The two combine to ravage your deck, making the wood warp, rot, crack and mildew. Rest assured that the glistening decks you see in magazine ads are brand new with freshly applied stain. Your deck may have looked that good when new, but it probably hasn't since, nor ever will again.

The truth of the matter is, you have to re-stain or re-treat the horizontal surfaces every year in order to keep decks looking their best. That's a lot of work, and frankly most of us don't do it.

The question of what to treat a deck with is not easy to answer. Ask a dozen painters and you'll get a dozen opinions. Most people treat a new deck with a clear sealer or a semi-transparent oil base stain. These help waterproof the wood, block ultraviolet light and stop mildew. At least, their labels make these claims. You can give your deck a good scrubbing and apply subsequent coats of the same product every year (or at least every other year) and have reasonable results.

But, let your deck go any longer and that's when the problems begin. To restore your deck to as close to its original state as possible, you need to strip off the old sealer or stain, or sand it off. There are bleaching products to lighten the bared wood, then you can seal or stain it again as you first did. This is a major, major job.

I'm ashamed to say that I let mine go three years and it looked terrible. Rather than strip or sand it clean, I decided to put two coats of primer on it and paint it with a latex deck paint. Paint manufacturers discourage this because the sun beats down on a flat surface and can cause the paint to crack and bubble. Rather than go through all the trouble of stripping my deck, I'll take my chances.

To make matters worse, the May 1997 Consumer Reports reported on a test the Consumers Union is conducting on 36 deck treatments. They've only concluded the first of a five-year study but the results are shocking. After just one year, nine products have performed so poorly that they cannot recommend them. Let the buyer beware! They are Behr #92 NWF Clear, Behr #89 Clear Preservative, DAP Water Repellent VOC, DAP Water Repellent Sealer, Sears Weatherbeater #18065, Thompson's Water Seal, Thompson's Water Seal Ultra, Tru-Test Tru-Seal, and Wolman Raincoat.

A product that works quite well if applied every other year is Life-Guard. You will need to power wash the deck before applying Life-Guard to be sure the surface is free

of dirt. The "Cedar" color is the closest to natural wood. It does not have a greasy finish, so it does not attract much dirt. The color "Cedar" is very attractive and those who have used this product find it works better than any of the others. Here's where to get it:

Friedman Bros. Home Improvement Center
1360 Broadway
Sonoma, CA 95476
939-8811

Manufactured by:

Life-Guard
Waterproofing Products, Inc.
P.O. Box 25166
Anaheim, CA 92825-5166
714-288-2827

Doors: Curing door problems is something anyone can handle

Our interior doors can suffer three ailments - they squeak, they stick, or they drag on the carpets. Let's start with the easiest - squeaking hinges.

The easiest solution is to squirt WD-40 or a lightweight oil like Three-in-One into the top crack of the hinges. Put a paper towel under each hinge as you squirt it to keep it from dripping. Swing the door open and shut a few times to let the lubricant work its way down the hinge pin. If a hinge still squeaks, repeat the procedure.

For stubborn squeaks, you may have to remove the offending hinge pin. Insert a nail set or long nail into the bottom of the hinge and tap the hinge pin loose from below. When the pin is up a half-inch or so, put a screwdriver on its collar and tap it all the way out. Remove only one hinge pin at a time. Oil the pin thoroughly and tap it back into place. Be sure you wipe up any oil drips.

Curing a sticking door is a bit harder. There are many reasons a door may stick. The hinges may be loose or improperly mounted, the house may have settled, or the wood may swell when damp. First, be sure all the screws on the hinges and strike plate are tight. Hopefully, that's all you need to do.

If the door still binds, gently open the door and see where it is binding. Lightly mark the location(s) on the door with a pencil. You will need to plane away some of the door where it is binding. You may be able to plane it without removing the door. Always plane from the edge toward the center to keep from splintering the wood. Plane off a little more than is necessary because the wood may swell in damp weather. You might need to paint any visible planed wood.

If it binds at the top too near the hinge side, you may have to remove the door. The top hinge is more important so always remove the bottom pin first, and replace the top pin first when re-hanging the door. You will definitely need to remove the door if it is dragging on the carpet. Mark how much you need to remove with a pencil. If you need to remove at least a quarter-inch, using a straight edge, draw a line across the door. Put masking tape over your mark to keep the wood from fraying when you saw it. Clamp a straight edge the door to guide your saw so you can make a straight cut. Lightly sand the edges and rehang the door.

Doors: How to keep the laundry room door from banging

I got tired of the laundry room/hallway door banging shut every time I opened garage/laundry room door. I also found it difficult to carry things into the laundry room from the garage and having to hold open both doors.

The Building Code requires the garage/laundry room door to be solid core and have spring-hinges. This is to keep the door shut and help prevent a garage fire from getting into the house, or at least slowing it down. That explains why that door slams shut. Wind swishes through the opened garage and funnels through the opened garage/laundry room door and slams shut the laundry room/hallway door. Annoying!

The cure is inexpensive and embarrassingly simple. The Stanley hardware company makes a brass colored Doorstop and Holder #75-6300 which I bought at Target in Rohnert Park. It comes in two pieces – a doorstop and a clip-shaped holder – plus screws. You screw the doorstop into the door and the holder into the wall. When you open the door all the way, the holder grabs the doorstop holding the door open. When you want to close the door, a gentle pull on the door handle pulls the doorstop out of the holder.

Let's assume your garage/laundry room door opens into the laundry room, rather than out into the garage. There is only one problem to overcome. The bottom of the door is higher off the floor than the baseboard. It wouldn't work to screw the holder to the wallboard because it would just pull loose. So, I nailed a piece of 1x2 inch molding to the wall just above the baseboard. I cut it 20 inches long so that it would reach two studs, which are normally 16 inches apart.

I always have trouble locating studs. Even with my trusty stud finder, I missed one of them. You can always drive a nail into the wallboard behind where the 1x2 will go. If you hit a stud, great. Measure 16 inches away and there should be another one. If you miss finding the first stud, move over an inch and try again. Keep moving on until you find the first stud, then locate the second one. Your 1x2 will cover the holes. Hint: There will be a stud one inch away from the electrical outlet. To find which side, tap the wallboard with a hammer.

For a professional-looking job, round the edges of the 1x2 and sand it before you nail it to the wall. Use at least four 2 1/2-inch finishing nails and countersink them. Fill the nail holes with filler, prime the 1x2, and paint it the same color as the walls.

Now you're ready to put on the doorstop and holder. Drill a small hole in the door where the doorstop will go. Be sure it is the same height off the floor as your 1x2. Screw in the doorstop. Slip the holder over the doorstop and open the door until the holder hits the 1x2. Drill small holes in the 1x2 and screw on the holder. Repeat the same procedure to put a doorstop and holder on the laundry room/hallway door. Naturally, both holders are screwed onto the same 1x2. Both doors should now be able to be held open.

What if your garage/laundry room door opens out into the garage? I would locate the 1x2 in the laundry room just as before so as to receive the laundry room/hallway door holder. I would still make it 20 inches long so that it will reach two studs. You can then nail another 20-inch 1x2 on the garage wall so as to receive that door's holder.

There is a simpler solution to all this, and it's cheaper. Buy two five-inch hook-and-eyes. Attach the hooks to the walls and the eyes to the faces of the doors around waist high. There isn't any need to nail 1x2 molding to hold the hook since there isn't that much pressure pulling on it. You should, however, sink mollies into the wall board and screw the hooks into them for added strength.

There's yet a simpler, cheaper solution provided your garage/laundry room door opens into the laundry room. Make a loop of strong string just long enough to tie the two door knobs together. When you want to hold both doors open, loop the string over both door knobs. This should hold both doors open.

Disinfectants: They can cause toilet flushing problems

Betty had some ladies over for bridge one afternoon when, horror of horrors, the toilet would not flush properly. The waste refused to go down and the water tank would not stop filling. One of the ladies said she knew exactly what was wrong, and she was right.

She (and Betty) had used a disinfectant tablet that you place in the bottom of the water tank. It had dissolved enough to go down the opening from the tank into the bowl, but could not get through the thrust hole in the bottom of the bowl. It was blocking the flow of water into the bowl, slowing it enough to keep the flapper from coming down in the tank so it could refill and shut off.

Got that? Let me try it again. When you flush the toilet, through a series of rods and chains, the flapper lifts letting water rush down from the tank into the bowl. Since water seeks its own level, the water from the tank pushes the bowl water into the drain, causing a siphoning action that cleans everything from the bowl. (At least in theory.)

On our toilets, water enters the bowl through a series of holes under the upper rim and through an inch-wide thrust hole in the bottom front of the bowl. It is the thrust of water rushing through this hole that pushes waste down the drain.

Some disinfectants such as 2000 Flushes come in a cake, like a round bar of soap. As it uses up its active ingredients, the bar slowly disintegrates. Eventually it is small enough to go down the tank's outlet but too large to go through the thrust hole. Since it restricts the thrust of the water into the bowl, all the waste doesn't get pushed down the drain.

You can actually see the remnant poking through the hole. I stuck long-nosed pliers into the hole and crushed the tablet. After several flushings and crushings, the "crumbs" all came out the hole and went down the drain.

Maybe the solution is to try a different type of disinfectant!

Exhaust Fans: Cleaning stove exhaust fan filters

Since everyone is so concerned about potential disasters, I thought I'd suggest a way to remedy one—a potential cause of kitchen fires. The hood over your stove is designed to keep smoke and grease from spreading into the rest of your kitchen. The hood collects the grease and lets it rise through a duct and out through a vent in your roof. To make that process more efficient, you can turn on the exhaust fan that helps suck up that greasy smoke and speeds it out of harm's way.

So far, so good, but that greasy smoke tends to collect on the hood and especially on the filters that protect the exhaust fan, and grease is highly combustible. Most kitchen fires occur when that grease catches on fire.

Cleaning those filters is a breeze. Remove them by gently pulling on the small loop handle and sliding the filter back and forth from front to back a few times. The filter should drop right out into your hand. Remember there are two filters.

The easiest way to clean them is to put them in your dishwasher along with your regular dishes and run the dishwasher as you normally would. Dishwashing compound is a great degreasing agent. The filters should come out looking like new. Put them back the same way you took them out. Be sure your exhaust fan is turned off when removing and replacing the filters, and don't run the fan until the filters are back in position.

Fire Extinguishers: Some distinguished remarks about fire extinguishers

You're cooking on the stove and some oil splatters, catches on fire, and starts to spread. You know what to do. Don't panic. Grab the fire extinguisher and put it out, right? Sure, that is if you know where it is, know how to use it, and it is properly charged! Here's a primer on household fire extinguishers, which we all have, or should have.

First, the Sonoma Valley Fire Department says we should never try to put out a fire if

- it's spreading beyond the immediate area,
- it's larger than a barrel,
- the fire could block your escape route,
- you are unsure how to use your fire extinguisher,
- or you are not sure that the extinguisher is designed for this type of fire.

If any of these is true, leave immediately, close the door behind you, and call 911.

There are three kinds of fire you are likely to encounter in your home:

- Type A - Ordinary Combustibles such as paper, cloth, wood, rubber and many plastics.
- Type B - Flammable Liquids such as oils, gasoline, paints, cooking grease etc.
- Type C - Energized Electrical Equipment - such as appliances or electric cords.

But, let's take a closer look at your fire extinguisher. It should say in big letters A B C, meaning it can be used to extinguish Type A, B and C fires. These extinguishers contain a dry chemical that suppresses the flames.

Your extinguisher probably has a gauge that will tell whether the extinguisher is full or needs recharging. (While you're looking at it, give the extinguisher a good head-over-heels shaking to dislodge the chemical which tends to cake on the bottom when stored too long in one position.)

The label probably gives you instructions on how to use it. Essentially,

1. pull the pin on the handle,
2. stand back six to eight feet,
3. aim low at the base of the fire,
4. squeeze the lever, and
5. sweeping the extinguisher from side to side, walk toward the fire.

You'd better be quick about it though, for your extinguisher will spray only for 8 or 10 seconds, but that should be enough. It has served its purpose. It's dead. It must be recharged, or discarded and replaced.

The Santa Rosa Fire Equipment Company will recharge and service certain fire extinguishers for a reasonable price. You can drop yours off at the Sonoma VOM Fire Department, 16900 Sonoma Hwy (at Agua Caliente Road) and pick it up a week later. Be sure to label your extinguisher with your name, address and phone number.

All extinguishers are not rechargeable. Cheaper ones aren't. The Company told me that those with black plastic handles made by the Kidde Company are not rechargeable. Unfortunately, these are very popular. I guess you either trust it still works, discard and replace it, or buy a more expensive rechargeable unit.

Furnaces: How our furnaces work

A resident called and asked why our furnaces blow cold air before the hot air starts coming, and is it supposed to. Another asked how long our furnaces should run and how often should they come on. Not knowing the specific answers, I looked in the Service and Maintenance Instructions Presley gave us when we moved in. This is what I found out.

- When the house cools down below the desired temperature, the thermostat tells the furnace heat is needed.
- An inducer motor comes on and lasts 15 seconds. This is called the prepurge period.
- The ignitor clicks on and takes 17 seconds to warm up.
- The gas valve opens permitting gas to flow into the burners where it is ignited.
- The flame continues for 60 seconds, after which the blower comes on full force.
- After the heat in the house reaches the desired temperature, the burners turn off and the blower continues for another 135 seconds before it turns off.

In lay persons' terms, it all boils down to this: The blower comes on at a slower speed for a total of 32 seconds to gently push the cooled air from the ducts into the house. Then gas enters the burner where it burns for 60 seconds to heat the air in the ducts. With the burner still burning, the blower comes on full force to push warm air into the house. After the room reaches the right temperature, the burners shut off but the blower continues for another 2 and 1/4 minutes to push all the heated air out of the ducts into the house.

It is easy to hear this entire cycle at night when the house is very quiet. You can hear the motor turn on at slow speed, after 32 seconds you hear the flame ignite. After a minute you hear the blower come on full speed. That is how I checked to see if my furnace is cycling correctly.

One cold night (outside temperature was 30 degrees) I listened to see how frequently the furnace went through this cycle. We set our night temperature at 60 degrees. The furnace went through the heat cycle every 8 minutes. This means it came on every 8 minutes and lasted 3 and 3/4 minutes. Naturally, this will vary depending on outside temperature and your desired temperature. Certainly I am not a furnace man, but it was reassuring to read all this and to see that all seems to be well.

On the matter of oiling the blower motor, Joe Dutra came up with a good idea. He had a hard time finding the filler cap until he used one of Elaine's compact mirrors. Also,

you'll probably need a pair of pliers to pull off the cap. Be careful not to drop and lose it.

The oiling instructions say, "Oiling must be done by a qualified service technician. Oil motor every two years if run continuously, every five years if run intermittently. Use 16-25 drops of S.A.E. 20 non-detergent motor oil."

Again, in laypersons' terms:

- It certainly shouldn't require a qualified technician.
- If you have the fan switch on your thermostat set to "Auto" rather than "On," your blower is running intermittently, so oiling it every five years is sufficient.
- Drop in enough oil until the filler tube starts to overflow, then wipe it clean.
- Any lightweight oil such as Three-In-One should work just fine.

Furnaces: Replacing furnace filters

One way to save on your heating/cooling bill, although it may seem insignificant, is to replace your furnace filters on a regular basis. Their purpose is to catch dust thereby keeping it from passing through the furnace and back into your home. As dust accumulates on the filter, it restricts the flow of cool air into your furnace and warm air back into your rooms. It is this reduced flow that wastes energy and gas.

Advice on how often to replace filters varies anywhere from twice a year to every month. I compromise and change ours on the seasonal change days—March 21, June 21, September 21, and December 21. All our Chantarelle homes take the same size filters, 1 x 14 x 24, which are available in the disposable models at Friedman Brothers, Yardbirds, and Home Depot. It makes sense to buy a half dozen at a time and store the extras until you need them.

There are two turn knobs on the air return grates. Turn these either clockwise or counter-clockwise, open the grate door and remove the old filter. As you do, notice on which side the webbing or net is on the filter. It should be on the inside—the side toward the furnace and away from the room. When you put in the new filter, be sure the webbing is on the inside, and the exposed spun glass is on the room side.

There are also permanent filters made of matted plastic that look much like a giant scruffy pad. Their manufacturers claim they collect more dust and pollen than the disposable spun glass models. They also cost quite a bit more. The advantage is they can be taken out, hosed off, shaken dry, and put back in. They are virtually indestructible. These also are available at the abovementioned stores. Be sure to get a 1 x 14 x 24 inch filter. Some companies make them in one size with an adjustable frame. Cut the filter material to 14 x 24 inches and adapt the frame to that size.

Either way, it makes sense to replace your furnace filters on a regular basis. The cost is nominal—certainly less than what they save you.

Furnaces: Replacing your furnace ignitor

We woke up the other morning to a cold house. The furnace wouldn't run. I kicked up the thermostat, but still it wouldn't. I flicked the selector switch to ON, then back to HEAT. The blower came on, but no heat. This meant the furnace was getting electricity but the pilot (technically called an ignitor) would not light.

I removed the lower front panel on the furnace, looked at the maze of wires and gadgets inside and figured I was in over my head, so I called a furnace man. He came out and knew at once what the problem was. He put in a new ignitor and was gone in fifteen minutes. Cost—$192: $120 for the ignitor, $9 sales tax on it, and $63 for the service call. I paid the bill, but was sure unhappy.

Thinking $120 was outrageous for such a small part, I called Appliance Parts Equipment Inc. in Santa Rosa (527-7877) who had the identical part for $35. I called the repair people and complained. They said if I would give them a replacement ignitor that was identical to the one they installed, they would refund my $129. I did, and they did. The savings, with tax, was $91.37. (This happened a few years ago, but the difference in cost is still relevant.)

These ignitors usually last about five years. If your furnace goes out and you're quite certain the ignitor has failed, it is not impossible to replace it yourself. The part is a Norton Model 271 ignitor, part number LH33ZS-004. A word of caution. The prongs on the ignitor are extremely brittle, so handle with the utmost of care. Appliance Parts Equipment is at 1145 Petaluma Hill Road.

Speaking of furnaces, everything I've read and heard about maintaining them says the most important thing is to change the filters, some say as often as monthly. (The maintenance schedule I've been recommending says every three months.) Clogged filters not only restrict the flow of air but also put additional strain on the blower motor.

And, speaking of blower motors, ours need to be lubricated with a light machine oil, such as Three-in-One. You have to remove the upper front panel to get at it. There is a safety switch that trips off the power when you remove that upper panel but I would unplug the furnace first anyway. The oil filler tube is bright silver-colored metal about the thickness of a pencil. It is on the left side of the motor and is a bear to find. You'll probably need a flashlight. Pull off the shiny metal cap and drop in oil until it starts to overflow. Replace the cap.

Furnaces: More on lubricating our furnace motors

A previous installment of this manual suggested lubricating the furnace fan motor with a light machine oil. Since I wrote that section, I've had occasion to check two neighbors' furnaces and could not find an oil filler tube on either of them. Upon further examination, the yellow instruction decal on the inside front of their furnaces said, "Oil not needed." Since I had just oiled mine again, I checked to see what my label had to say. It also said, "Oil not needed. "What's up?

When I had my furnace serviced two years ago, the repairman showed me where to find the filler tube and suggested I oil it every couple of years. I looked again at our Service and Maintenance Instructions that came with the house. It clearly says, "Oiling must be done by a qualified service technician. Oil motor every two years if run continuously, every five years if run intermittently. Use 16-25 crops of S.A.E. 20 non-detergent motor oil," yet the instructions on the furnace itself say, "Oil not needed." It's your call from here. It can't hurt to oil it if you can find your filler tube. If you can't, then I guess it doesn't matter.

By the way, last time I looked in Friedman Brothers they did not have our size furnace filters, but I found them at Parsons Hardware out on Hwy. 12.

P.S. A homeowner showed me an article in the San Francisco Chronicle about the potential hazards of plastic exhaust furnace pipe. Apparently, the "faulty plastic flue pipe. . .has been associated with several deaths in the United States." The homeowner asked if we should be concerned. No, our furnace flue pipes are galvanized sheet metal.

Garages: Installing a garage light reminder

The other morning I went out to the garage and realized I'd left the garage light on all night. . .again! And, that was the day after I'd been over to see Ben Rampulla and noticed his garage light switch had a reminder pilot light. I decided to check out what's involved in installing such a switch.

Friedman Bros. has a Leviton Combination Single Pole Switch and Pilot Light #5226-ISP. I also bought an ivory-colored duplex outlet faceplate for 29 cents. The switch has a red light that is on when the garage light is on, much like the red light on a coffee maker or answering machine.

The instructions in the box were reasonably helpful. After turning off the correct circuit breaker, I took off the faceplate, loosened the screws and pulled out the original switch. In our house, the circuit breaker switch is the next-to-the-bottom blue one.

Inside the junction box were white wires tied together with a connector. There also were black wires tied together and a single black wire that went to each side of the switch. Unfortunately, there were many more wires than were illustrated on the instructions.

I disconnected the two black wires and removed the original switch. I connected them to the new pilot light switch as shown on the instructions, that is the black wires to the lower screws—the brass colored ones—the ones on each side of the toggle switch. That was the easy part.

The instructions show a white wire connected to the upper right-hand screw. I cut an eight-inch piece of #14 wire with white covering and stripped each end. I connected one end of that wire to the upper right-hand screw as shown. I removed the connector from the bundled white wires, wrapped the other end of my wire to them and screwed the connector back on. Voila!

I turned the circuit breaker back on and checked to make sure everything worked—the garage light, the pilot light, the ceiling light in the utility room and the exhaust fan. Everything did. I turned off the circuit breaker again, pushed the switch back into the junction box, tightened up the switch and put the new faceplate on.

Now all I have to remember to do is check the pilot light when we go to bed.

Garages: Garage door maintenance

Our original one-piece swing-up garage doors have a synthetic rubber weather-strip on the bottom to help keep out dirt and moisture. Understandably, these can crack, split and tear loose. Actually, the appearance of a drooping length of weather-strip is more of a cosmetic problem than a physical one, but replacing it is cheap and easy.

Friedman Bros. (what would we do without them!) has a product called simply "Weather-strip for Garage Doors." How's that for originality? Be sure to get the 16 1/2-foot size. It comes complete with nails.

The instructions on the package say it all. Our original weather-strip is nailed between the door's frame and the decorative trim. Cut it off with a knife. You would have to tear the door apart to nail the new strip inside where the old one was, so don't bother.

Instead, close the door. See how far the door is above the garage floor. You'll want to allow that much plus another half-inch to overlap on the floor.

Open the door again and nail the strip to the garage side of the bottom frame of the door. Use scissors to cut around the truss rod and to cut away the excess. The door should close with the bottom edge of the new strip laying a half-inch on the floor. That's it!

Unpainted wood can swell when wet. Presley painted the outside of our garage doors, but not the inside. You can double the life of your door if you prime the inside of it with exterior primer, and finish it with a top paint. You could give it two coats of primer and leave it primer white if you wish. It is essential to prime/paint the top, bottom and side edges.

It's a good idea to lubricate all pivoting metal points on the door's hardware every three months. Use household oil, silicone spray or WD-40.

Many of you bought roll-up doors. Maintenance on them is more involved. The Reader's Digest New Complete Do-It Yourself Manual says, ". . .oil the roller bearings, pulleys, and cables every six months." Again, use household oil, silicone spray or WD-40, "but not oil or grease on the tracks themselves for they collect grit." Instead, wipe the tracks clean with silicone spray or WD-40. "Rub candle wax along the inside edges of the doorstop (the trim in front of the door) to prevent door sections from chafing as they go up and down."

Garages: Maintaining your roll-up door so it will continue to roll up

I've received some calls from people with a common complaint their roll-up garage door squeaks when rising and lowering. I'm not surprised. Mine did too. I'm not talking about the one-piece doors that originally came with our houses, but the hinged roll-up variety many of us had installed later.

I called Sonoma Overhead Door and they gave me this advice:

- Any place where metal moves against metal should be squirted with WD-40 periodically.
- The most likely squeaks come from the large counter balance spring at top. Close the garage door. From inside the garage, it is clearly visible above the door. Squirt it liberally, then open and close the door a few times, then squirt it again. Repeat this until the lubricant works its way down into the spring.
- Next move to the hinges. There are probably four or five that connect each panel to its neighbor. Squirt inside the left and right side of each hinge stem, for this is where the metal moves.
- At both ends of each panel are two wheels. These ride up and down inside a track when you raise and lower the door. Squirt WD-40 into the sleeve in which the wheel stems or axles rotate. Take a look at the actual wheels. If they are plastic, leave them alone. If they are metal, than use a screw driver or a small stick like an ice cream stick to spread a little grease along the bottom of that track.
- Finally, we get to the chain. If your opener is a Stanley model, our original ones were, a chain that looks like a bicycle chain runs from the opener to the door and back. This should also be sprayed along its entirety with WD-40. You may want to drive your cars out and spread a little newspaper on the floor because it will drip.

You may have a different make opener. Most Genie models have a screw drive instead of a chain. This should be lubricated with the same grease you may have used on your tracks. If LifeMaster made your opener, it does not need any lubrication.

If you have any questions, you might give Sonoma Overhead a call at 996-4132, or the company that installed your door.

Garages: Oiling the garage door hinge

Some years ago on another house, a pin on our garage door hinge sheered off, rendering the door inoperable at that time. It cost $135 to have the hinge replaced, whereas a nickel's worth of oil would have prevented it. What's that old adage about an ounce of prevention. . . . .?

Assuming you have Chantarelle's original solid garage door, there are several points on each hinge where the door pivots or moves. It takes just a minute or two to add a few drops of oil at each of these points. I use Three-in-One Household oil but you could spray WD-40 or any lubricant. It's also a good idea to oil the door opener's chain and track while you're at it.

This is one of those tasks that takes but a minute to do, but we never get around to doing. I like to use the seasons to remind me to do them. If it is something that needs to be done twice a year, I do them when we change our clocks in April and October. If it is a job that needs to be done four times a year, do them at the seasonal changes, March 21, June 21, Sept. 21 and Dec. 21.

Garages: Painting your garage floor

Tired of the grease/rust/paint/water/anti-freeze/oil stains on your garage floor? There is a solution. Paint it, but not with just any paint. Use epoxy paint.

Many paint makers sell what they call "garage floor" paint, but if you read the fine print on the back of the label, there is usually a disclaimer stating that hot, wet tires "may peel the paint up off the garage floor." This stands to reason. The very same road gripping power you want your tires to have on wet, slick roads is still there when you park your car in the garage.

The absolutely hardest paint you can buy and the only one guaranteed not to get pulled up by wet tires is an oil-based epoxy paint. It is available at Sonoma Paint Center on West Napa St. You need two gallons—one, part A and one, part B—that you mix together.

An alternative is a water-based epoxy paint available at Home Depot for less than half the price of the oil-based paint. Each gallon contains parts A and B that you still have to mix. The advantages to any water-based paint are obvious. It's cheaper. It goes on easier. It's easier to clean up after you are done. The label on the brand Home Depot sells says, "When properly applied, LITEX's 2-part, water based epoxy coating system will help prevent peeling caused by hot automotive tires."

I took that claim at face value and bought the LITEX product. It took two gallons to put a double coat on my floor, and if I say so myself, it looks great. It is impervious to just about anything. I can wipe up oil spots, or any kind of spots, with a damp rag. And, it sweeps up easily leaving much less dirt to track into the house.

The secret to any paint job, especially on a garage floor, is getting the surface clean. I swept then vacuumed the floor. I absorbed what grease spots there were, then scrubbed the entire floor on my hands and knees with hot water with detergent in it. It took longer to clean the floor than to paint it, but I was determined to get the paint to adhere. You can walk on the painted floor in a few hours, but it must cure for seven days before you can drive on it. The big question remains, "Will wet tires peel up this paint?" I may have to wait until it rains again to find out, and I will let you know. But, if a water-based epoxy will do the trick, it is certainly easier to apply, and at less than half the price.

Gutters: Ready for a little 'gutter talk?'

The other morning I looked out the kitchen window and saw water dripping from a gutter downspout. That could mean only one thing - my gutters and especially the downspouts needed cleaning. This surprised me because I had flushed out the entire system last year and I don't have any trees that could drop leaves into them. Even so, dust, dirt, and slivers of cedar from the shakes managed to plug up the system.

I used my trusty Gutter Getter plastic scoop to remove the heavy crud, then crammed the hose down the clogged downspout to free it. If the water from the hose hadn't unclogged the downspout, I would have had to feed a plumber's snake down it. Fortunately, water was soon flowing down, out through the underground flexible plastic tube, and into the street. Be sure to wear heavy gloves because those rusty sheet metal screws are killers.

Properly functioning gutters are more important than one might think. Plugged downspouts can make water back up and even overflow. This can cause damage to exterior walls, erosion of the soil around the foundation, and in the worst-case scenario, uneven settling of the foundation. Yuck!

Our gutters are made of galvanized sheet metal. They would be terribly expensive to replace, yet we know galvanized metal won't last forever. You may have already noticed rust showing through the paint, especially the undersides near the corners and downspouts. That's where debris tends to pile up and force water to stand.

There are some things we can do to prolong our gutter's life. They should be flushed out twice a year (late spring and late fall) to help keep water from standing in them. This is particularly important if the four columns at the entry to your front yard have a shake roof as opposed to an open lattice design. The gutter goes around that roof making several close right angle turns. These are potential trouble spots.

I'm going to wait until the rains have stopped for good this summer, then paint the inside of the gutters. Everything I've read on the subject says to:

- flush out the gutters as clean as possible,
- use a wire brush to scrape away rust flakes and other debris, and flush again,
- let the gutters dry out completely,
- patch any holes with scraps of aluminum screen and asphalt roof cement,
- and finally, paint the entire inside with an asphalt-based paint.

Home Safety: Keeping your home safe from fires

According to the National Fire Protection Association, home fires cause more than $5 billion in property damage each year, and more than 3,000 deaths. That's the bad news. The good news is that most fires are preventable. First, let's look at the top causes of home fires.

Cooking fires.

- Cooking fires pose a serious hazard. Always stay near the stove when cooking.
- Avoid wearing loose sleeves while cooking. They can be ignited by a burner or a grease splatter.
- Keep flammable materials well away from the range or oven.
- Never put water on a grease fire. It can cause the hot grease to splatter, burning you or spreading the fire. Instead, smother it with a lid or another pan, then turn off the burner. Leave the lid in place until it has cooled completely.

Portable heaters.

- Electric heaters can ignite clothing, shower curtains, towels and other flammable items. Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from all heaters.
- Shut off a heater before you leave the room or go to bed.
- When you purchase an electric heater, make sure it's been tested and approved by the Underwriters Laboratories (UL). This information is usually located in the warranty.

Careless smoking.

- Cigarettes are the leading cause of fire deaths. Never smoke in bed or in a place where you may fall asleep.
- Use deep ashtrays so a lit cigarette won't roll out and fall onto rugs or furniture.
- Run water over an ashtray before emptying it into the trash. A smoldering cigarette butt could set the trash on fire.

Electrical hazards.

- You can't see electric wires hidden inside walls and ceilings, but there are some warning signs of electrical problems.

- If lights dim or flicker, circuit breakers trip frequently, or sparks shoot from receptacles when items are plugged in or unplugged, consult an electrician.
- Faulty electrical cords can also spark a fire or cause an electrical shock.
- Never run cords under rugs or heavy furniture. Pressure can crack insulation and break the wires.
- Don't overload receptacles.
- Don't use light bulbs with greater wattages than a fixture is designed to handle.

Fireplaces.

- Special precautions can help to keep fireplace fires burning safely.
- Never burn charcoal or use a hibachi in your fireplace. Both produce deadly carbon monoxide.
- Protect against flying sparks by keeping the glass enclosure tightly closed.
- Keep flammable objects such as newspapers and magazines well away from the fireplace.
- Never close the flue while a fire is still smoldering. Carbon monoxide could build up.
- Never use gasoline, kerosene or lighter fluid to start a fire. Burn only dry, seasoned hardwood. For extra safety, light fires with long-stemmed matches.
- Have your fireplace and chimney inspected annually. They should be properly vented and free of blockages. Have them cleaned as needed.
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy.

Holiday hazards.

- Decorations and candles are a special concern during the holidays.
- If you buy a live Christmas tree, choose a fresh one and water it daily.
- Make sure your artificial tree is made of flame-retardant materials.
- Keep candles well away from anything that can burn. Blow them out when you leave the room or go to bed.
- Remove holiday decorations from the fireplace and mantle before building a fire to avoid having the decorations ignite.

Other hazards.

- Never store or use gasoline in the home. Gasoline is a motor fuel only. Keep small quantities in an approved container designed to store gasoline, and store outside, preferably in a locked, detached shed. Wipe up spills immediately and never refuel motors near heat sources, sparks or cigarettes.

- Don't let combustible materials such as newspapers and rags pile up in the utility room or garage.
- Leave plenty of air space around appliances and television sets. They can overheat and catch fire.
- Use outdoor gas and charcoal grills with caution. Keep them away from structures, particularly when in use. Never add materials to the fire.

Home Safety: Fire prevention devices

According to the National Fire Protection Association, home fires cause more than $5 billion in property damage each year, and more than 3,000 deaths. Here is what to do if a fire breaks out in your home.

Smoke detectors.

You are most likely to be alerted to a fire in your home by your smoke detectors. If you have added additional smoke detectors and they are battery operated, replace the batteries once a year. To help you remember, plan to install new batteries on an annual event, such as your birthday or the Fourth of July. Replace the smoke detector itself after ten years. Presley-installed smoke detectors do not use batteries.

Fire extinguishers.

Visit your local hardware store and invest in a few fire extinguishers. These are classified according to the type of fire they will put out, and you'll find the classification displayed on the extinguisher. Class ABC extinguishers are multi-purpose and work well against any small, self-contained fire.

- Keep one fire extinguisher in the kitchen and extras in the garage.
- Don't attempt to fight a fire yourself unless you know you have the right extinguisher, and be sure to keep your back to a safe exit.
- What to do when a fire breaks out.
- Take immediate action. Smoke and flames spread rapidly.
- Get out of the house right away, then call the fire department from a neighbor's house or with a cellular phone.
- Use your safest exit. Fumes overcome most victims long before the flames reach them. If you must escape through smoke, get down and crawl low under the smoke, keeping your head about 12-24 inches off the floor.

Home Safety: A fire safety checklist

Do you follow the fire prevention practices outlined in the previous articles? Here is a handy Fire Safety Checklist to help you keep you and your home safe from fires.

Fire Safety Checklist

__ Pay special attention to safety tips on cooking, smoking, use of electric heaters, proper storage of flammable objects, and precautions regarding using your fireplace.

__ Are your smoke detectors working? Test each detector monthly, and replace batteries annually to battery-operated detectors you may have installed. Presley-installed smoke detectors do not use batteries.

__ Do you hold regular fire drills? Several times a year you should practice exiting your home safely and quickly in the event of an emergency. Designate a meeting place once you are all out of the house.

__ Have you planned an alternate escape route? It's important to have at least two escape routes from each room in your home, often a door and a window. Practice using them now to be sure you could get out in an emergency.

__ Can you safely exit from the second floor? A chain ladder or other easily accessible ladder can help you escape from the upper stories of your home in the event of a fire.

__ Do you know how to use your fire extinguishers? Know where they are kept, and read the instructions before you need them.

Home Safety: Security

Every year, burglars hit more than five million households, stealing more than $4 billion worth of property. Determined thieves can break into just about any home, but you can take steps to make entry a lot more difficult for them.

Invest in a security door.

Front door security begins with a substantial and properly installed security door. These can't be kicked open, popped open or jimmied open. They are available for well under $100 at outlets such as Home Depot.

Don't forget windows.

Windows and sliding glass doors should also be secured. Look for locks specifically made for that purpose at hardware stores. You can also secure a sliding glass door with a broomstick or piece of 1x2-inch lumber laid in the door track when the door is closed.

Light up.

Outside flood lighting reduces your risk of burglary by highlighting the exterior of your home at night. You can choose from lights that remain on all night or motion-sensitive lights that come on only when someone approaches your home. Motion-sensitive lights save energy and could catch a would-be thief by surprise. Timers on inside as well as outside lights give the impression that someone is home, even if you're on vacation, out to dinner, or visiting the neighbors.

If you have a security system.

Keep in mind that false alarms can be a problem. In addition to annoying the neighbors and taking the police away from real emergencies, some communities now assess fines for excessive false alarms. The National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association reports that nearly 80 percent of false alarms are caused by human error. Steps to prevent false alarms include regular system maintenance and ensuring that whoever has a key to your house also knows the codes to activate and deactivate your system.

P.S. Julio Pasos called to say his security system was ringing at unusual and unexpected times. He suspected it was a warning signal saying his back-up battery needed replacement. He was right. Forest Black suggested he call Alert Technology at 996-9059.

They came out and replaced the battery and tested his whole system. It cost $30 for the battery and $45 for the service call. Since these batteries should be replaced every 3-5 years and we've been here nearly 10, if you haven't replaced yours, you may want to keep their phone number handy. Thanks to Forest and Julio for the tip.

Home Safety: A crime-stopper's checklist

Every year, burglars hit more than five million households, stealing more than $4 billion worth of property. Determined thieves can break into just about any home, but you can take steps to make entry a lot more difficult for them. Here is a Crime-Stoppers' Checklist.

Crime-Stoppers' Checklist

Use this quiz to evaluate the security of your house.

__ Do you have a dog? Barking dogs attract the kind of attention a burglar doesn't need.

__ Do you leave a radio or television set on when you're out? The sound of voices will send an intruder elsewhere.

__ Do you have inside lamps on a timer? Burglars love to look for dark houses. When you're out, automatic lamps illuminate your home making it look less attractive to burglars.

__ Do you keep your garage door closed all the way? Thieves like attached garages like we have because, once inside, they can unobtrusively force open the door to the house. Keep your utility room door locked when you're out. Keep it locked at all times if you leave your garage door slightly open for your pet's access.

__ Do you refuse to open doors to strangers? Always ask for identification or check the driveway for a repair or delivery truck. If in doubt, call the utility or business in question to ask if they have sent someone to your home.

__ Do you keep your backyard trees and shrubbery trimmed? Overgrown vegetation gives a burglar more privacy.

__ Do you have neighbors collect your mail and newspapers while you're away? You can also ask the post office and paper carrier to hold deliveries until you return.

__ Does your neighborhood have a watch program? If not, get together with a group of your nearest neighbors to set up an informal program to watch out for each others' homes.

Home Safety: A home safety checklist

In the previous sections, we have been talking about home safety, namely fire safety and theft prevention. In this section, we provide a complete checklist to see just how safe your home is in these and in other areas.

Home Safety Checklist

Smoke alarms

__ Do you check periodically for proper operation?

__ If battery operated, do you check the batteries each month and replace them yearly?

Fire extinguishers

__Easily accessible?

__Fully charged?

__Are they within the expiration date?

Plumbing

__Do you periodically check the hoses and connections on the following devices to see if they are secure and leak-free?

__Hot water tank

__Washing machine

__Dishwasher

__Ice maker

Electrical

__Are extension cords overloaded?

__Are extension cords removed from under rugs or furniture?

__Do you have surge protector bars on entertainment equipment, computers, and garage workbenches?

Heating system

__Is your furnace cleaned and checked annually?

__Are the filters changed regularly?

Chimney/Fireplace

__Are they cleaned and checked annually?

__Is the damper functioning properly?

__Is the glass door still operating properly?

Frozen pipe prevention

__Is your home heated while you're away on winter vacations?

__Do you disconnect the garden hose and shut off outside faucets when temperature drops to freezing?

Roof

__Is the roof in good condition?

__Are the gutters cleaned every autumn to help prevent roof leaks?

Miscellaneous

__Are flammable materials properly stored? (For example, be sure clothes are not stored near the furnace or hot water heater.)

__Do the trees surrounding your house have healthy limbs that are not likely to break off and damage your house?

__Do you check the safety and condition of your outdoor deck on a yearly basis? (Look for rot; check for stability; treat annually with water sealer.)

__Do you check the caulking around the tub/shower area to prevent water seepage?

Lights: Installing a light in your upstairs closet

We found our upstairs closet as dark as an Egyptian tomb, especially at night. It was a rather simple task to install a light on the wall just to the left of the sliding doors.

You'll need to buy a light fixture, two junction boxes, a light switch and face plate, around five feet of grounded #14 wire and a four conduit clamps.

Begin by removing the medicine cabinet. I then cut the hole in the plasterboard for the switch below the medicine cabinet, on a line with the existing duplex outlet and fan switch, and halfway between them. Install that junction box. You can tie into the duplex outlet to get your white, black and ground wires. Connect them to the switch you've bought.

Inside the closet, cut a hole for your light's junction box somewhere over the medicine cabinet cavity and about six feet off the floor. Install that junction box. Through the cavity, feed the wire from the switch up to the light's junction box. Be sure to use the conduit clamps to keep the wire from fraying when coming into and leaving the boxes.

The light I bought was a simple kitchen ceiling light fixture with a frosted globe. It took about two hours to complete the project and we now have light in the closet that makes it easier to find things. Now, the only problem I have is remembering what I went in there to get!

Lights: Installing an entry security light

One evening a few years back, when Jean Wallman Coffee lived here, I dropped something off on her doorstep. She wasn't home but as I walked up her entry sidewalk, I was welcomed by a flood of light. My movement had triggered the sensor on a security light she had installed. I left the package, and after I walked out, the lights switched off.

I was impressed and decided to install such a system on my house. I liked the idea of lights coming on to illuminate the front walk whenever a guest approached, or left. I also liked the deterrent effect a sudden flood of light would have on any unwanted intruder.

Happily the project was simpler than I had imagined. I bought a Woods Motion Detector Security Light Kit, model #23195/2155 at Friedman Brothers, and two flood light bulbs. The instructions that came in the box were easy to understand and well illustrated. The only other things you'll need are a round junction box, two cable clamps and about four feet of #14 grounded wire.

The major problem was getting a "hot" wire to the desired location. It is infinitely better if the wire is always hot, and not one controlled by a light switch. The two-bedroom and three-bedroom houses have a hot wire very close by. The loft model is another problem, and frankly, I haven't figured how to get a wire where you would want it with that model.

In the kitchen of the two and three bedroom models, there is a wall between the sink window and the large window. It is about four feet wide and has an electrical outlet and a phone jack. With a saber saw, I cut a 4-inch round hole in the outside wallboard 30 inches directly over that outlet. It must be directly over the outlet.

The safest way to find the right place is to follow up the row of nails fastening the wallboards to the stud right next to the outlet. Be sure your hole is on the same side of the stud as the outlet. Also, be sure your hole is directly next to the stud.

After turning off the electricity at the circuit breaker box, I removed the wall plate on the kitchen outlet so I could get at the junction box. I removed the outlet and pried off a knockout plug in the top of the junction box.

The only tricky part was feeding the #14 wire through the new hole in the junction box up inside the wall to the hole I had cut in the outside. Fortunately, you only have to go 30 inches. A wire coat hanger helped make the job easier. Once I could pull the wire through the outside hole, I went back inside.

Be sure to slip a cable clamp over the wire and through your knockout hole in the junction box. Cinch it up tightly. Slip the bared ends of your new wire into the slots in the back of the outlet, being sure all white wires are on one side of the outlet, and all black wires on the other side. Twist together your new ground wire to the existing ground wire and screw them back onto the green screw on the outlet.

Screw the outlet back into the junction box and put the face plate back on. You are done inside.

Outside, pry off a knockout plug on the bottom side of your new junction box. Feed your wire through that hole and clamp it in place with a cable clamp. Insert the junction box into your hole and nail it securely to the stud. Use solderless connectors to connect the security light's wires to your #14 wire—white to white, black to black, and ground to ground.

Screw your security light to the junction box, screw in your bulbs and flip on the electricity at the circuit breaker box. The instructions with your light tell you how to adjust the sensitivity of your sensor and how long you want the light to stay on.

Maintenance Jobs: Do these quarterly maintenance jobs

- Replace your furnace filters. Be sure the airflow arrows are pointing away from the room.
- Oil your garage door's hinges and other moving metal parts.
- Test your smoke alarms by pressing hard on the test button until you hear a squeal. The squeal indicates the alarm is functioning properly.
- Test the GFCI electric outlets in your garage and kitchen. Press the black button which should make the red button pop out. Then reset by pressing the red button.
- Clean sink, tub and shower drains by pouring Drano or similar product into the drains.

Miscellaneous: Three great, inexpensive projects

Doorbell button

I wouldn't be surprised if the plastic button on your doorbell is cracked or broken. Mine was, and many others I've noticed. The sun's ultra-violet rays beat down on the thin plastic weakening it. All it takes to break it is a good hard push.

The doorbell was probably a casualty if you had your house painted. My guess is that the painter masked the button with tape and when he pulled the tape off, it broke the weakened plastic button. The solution is quick and cheap. Friedman Brothers has an assortment of inexpensive doorbell buttons.

It will take a very tiny screwdriver to remove your present doorbell button assembly. Inside it are red and white wires attached to two terminals. Loosen the screws, remove the wires, and attach them to the terminals on the new doorbell assembly. It doesn't matter which wire goes to which terminal. Test the doorbell before re-attaching the assembly back on the wall.

Graphite spray

NAPA auto parts store, on West Napa Street across from Kragen's Auto Parts, has a neat product called LOCK-EASE—a graphite lock fluid. Graphite is the ideal lubricant for door locks and hinges. In this product, the graphite powder is suspended in a liquid medium that evaporates very quickly.

Insert the thin red tube into the lock, give it a quick squirt, and wait a few minutes. The medium evaporates leaving a thin coating of graphite on all the lock's moving parts. It also works well on hinges to keep them from squeaking. Have a paper towel handy for it might drip.

Recently, I suggested you use a graphite or silicone spray on the bottom tracks of our sliding doors. LOCK-EASE will do that admirably, but I would remove the red tube before spraying.

Clean tub and shower mildew

One unwelcome result of El Nino may be a wet winter's collection of mildew in the corners of your shower enclosure. One easy and inexpensive way to remove mildew is to mix a cup of bleach with a quart of water. Pour the solution into an old spray bottle.

Wet the mildewed area with water, then spray on the solution. Wait a bit then wipe clean with a paper towel. Be sure the room is well ventilated. Also be sure you don't spray the solution on towels or shower curtains.

If there is a build-up of soap scum, you can remove it with either a solution of water conditioner (such as Calgon) and water, or a solution of one part vinegar to four parts water.

Patching: Patching plastered walls

Our nine-year old walls are starting to show signs of age—dents and cracks. Dents can be caused by banging doorknobs, a bump by a piece of heavy furniture, and as is the case in our house, dimples where the joint compound has shrunk over some of the nails. These are easy and inexpensive to repair and it is a job any of us can do.

Be sure the area around the dent or dimple is dry and clean. Sandpaper the recessed area. This roughs up the surface so the joint compound will adhere better. Hopefully there won't be a tear in the cardboard, but if so, carefully cut or peel off the loose cardboard before sanding.

Friedman Bros. has joint compound in ready-to-use paste form. Dip a little compound onto a wide putty knife and drag it over the recessed area to squeeze the compound into it. It is advisable, and a necessity in the case of deep dents, to apply a second coat after the first dries (24 hours). Compound tends to shrink as it dries. When thoroughly dry, finish-sand the repair with fine sandpaper.

Now comes the artistic part. Try to match the textured surface of your repair with the surrounding wall. Dip your fingertips into the tub of joint compound and dab a bit or bits of it on top of your patch. Use the putty knife to flatten the dabs until they are the height of the surrounding texture. When completely dry, use your fine sandpaper to smooth out the rough spots.

As our houses settle, cracks can appear in the drywall. You can fill hairline cracks by putting a little compound on your finger and dragging it firmly along the crack. Larger cracks require a little more work. Use the edge of your putty knife to clean out any loose chunks of gypsum. Blow out all the loose gypsum so the compound can adhere. Drag the putty knife along the crack to force compound into it. Move the knife in several directions to fill the crack completely. Sand, texture and finish-sand just as you would for dents.

Settling also can cause some nails that attach the wallboard to the studs to pop. Hammer the popped nail back in 1/32" below the surface. For good measure, hammer another nail a couple inches directly above or below the popped nail, again to a depth of 1/32". Fill, texture and sand the dimples just as any other. Ideally, you should touch up the repair with primer before applying the top paint. But, let's face it. Most repairs are small and no one will know the difference whether we prime or not.

Painting: Painting the inside of your home

In the section above, we talked about repairing the dents and cracks in our plaster. This was likely done as preparation for painting our interiors. Heavily trafficked areas like hallways take a beating, especially at the corners. By using the paint that was originally used, you might be able to spot the scuff marks and get away with it.

Presley used Kelly Moore Super Latex Flat Wall Paint #550-36 Navajo White on the ceilings and walls, except in the kitchen, bathrooms and utility room. For those and for all doors, doorjambs and windowsills, Presley used Kelly Moore's Acry-Plex Latex Semi-Gloss Enamel #1650-36 Navajo White.

Any paint job is only as good as the prep work. To keep cleanup to a minimum, tape lightweight plastic over the windows and doors to protect them from paint spatters. This does not have to be precise. Extend the plastic an inch or so around their perimeters.

Take down all pictures and wall hangings. Pull out the nails and measure their height from the floor and distance from a window or door for re hanging after. Fill the holes with joint compound or spackling compound. Take down curtains and drapes. You may want to paint around their hooks rather than remove them. Carefully cover the baseboards with masking tape. Here patience and accuracy is important.

Remove all the faceplates around light switches and outlets. Cover the stationary parts with masking tape. Remove the latch plates. Remove the doorknobs or cover them with tape and a plastic sandwich bag.

Wipe or dust the walls thoroughly to be sure all spider webs, dust, dirt or what-all is completely removed. In the kitchen and baths, you might need to wash finger marks and other greasy areas with Simple Green, which leaves no grit to have to rinse off.

Spread plastic on the floors. On top, spread drop cloths or old sheets, especially around the perimeter of the room. If nothing else, put several layers of newspaper around the edges on top of the plastic. Move as much furniture into the middle of the room as you can and cover it well.

If you stay with Navajo White, you may not need to paint the ceilings. This will greatly simplify the task. Use a roller with a 3/8-inch nap. The roller pile can be any synthetic material, except lamb's wool, which is not good with latex paints.

Be sure the paint is thoroughly mixed. Even though you had it shaken at the paint store, store each can upside down for 24 hours before using. Before starting, keep a moist sponge or rag and pail of clean water handy to mop up accidents.

Start rolling the walls at the top, being careful not to "bump" the ceiling. Roll basically in three-foot squares. Roll a large letter "M" in your square then zigzag in different directions to spread the paint evenly. Always start rolling by pushing the roller away from you rather than toward you, and do not lift the roller until you are ready to load it with more paint. You should be able to finish each square with one load of paint. Start in the left corner of the room (if you are right handed) and roll in your three-foot squares down to the floor.

Then start the next row at the top and work your way down. Continue this way until a wall is finished. Roll up to, but not onto, the plastic covering the windows and doors. Roll down to an inch or so from the baseboards. The slower you move your roller, the fewer paint spatters you'll get.

When you are through rolling a room, brush the top of the wall cutting into the ceiling and the area above the baseboards. A good 1 1/2-inch angled sash brush is ideal for this close work. Synthetic brushes (nylon, polyester or a blend of them) is better for latex paints than natural bristle brushes.

Peel off the plastic around your doors and windows and brush the walls right up to them. Paint up to but not on the wood trim. After the paint on the walls has dried for half-an-hour, peel the masking tape off the baseboards. Don't wait too long. So much for the flat work.

Eventually, you are going to brush the semi-gloss on the doorjambs, doors, and window sills. Some people like to finish one room at a time and will paint the trim immediately. Others like to do the flat wall paint in all the rooms first, then all the trim. Your choice, but let the flat paint dry at least an hour before doing the trim.

The rule of thumb on painting doors is to work from top to bottom, horizontally first, then vertically. The best way to paint our six-panel doors is to paint the top two panels first, then the middle two panels, then the bottom two, then the four horizontal sections (rails) starting at the top, then the three vertical sections (stiles). Finally, paint the door's edges, then the doorjamb.

Basically, the same procedure for painting walls (and ceilings) applies to the kitchen, bathrooms and utility room. Personally, in small bathrooms, I would just as soon brush

it all rather than mess with the extra protection needed for rolling. Naturally, you'll use the same paint on the trim as on the walls. Never dip the bristles more than one-third into the paint. When brushing large surfaces such as walls, brush first with short strokes in many different directions in a small foot-square area. Then, level the paint with a back-and-forth horizontal motion.

Rolling the walls (and worse yet the ceilings) in the two story homes poses extra challenges. I chickened out and did not paint my ceilings. Standing on a stepladder, I used an extension pole on the roller to help reach the high areas. Then I used an extension ladder to brush the top few inches of the high walls before rolling them. I tied an old towel around the ladder tops to protect freshly painted walls. Using a stepladder, chair, a few 2x8 planks and some C-clamps, you can rig up a temporary scaffold to help paint the stairway.

What about safety in all of this? Always paint in a well-ventilated room. Paint bedrooms early in the morning so the fumes will dissipate by bedtime. Wear a disposable painter's mask, and wear goggles to keep spatters from getting into your eyes when rolling high surfaces.

Pest Control: Drats! The Rats!

A bit of history: A representative from the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control visited Chantarelle some time ago to give us pointers on how to address our rat problems. The County only advises, it does not provide assistance, as the Health Department does not consider the problem a health hazard. The attached information sheet gives you pertinent data on the types of rats common to this area and a detailed drawing of how to secure your property against the proliferation of rats.

Roof Rats versus Norway Rats

The Roof Rat (or Black Rat or Tree Rat) is more common in this area, although there is no shortage of Norway Rats. The Roof Rat's tail is longer than the head and body combined. They run along fences and eat fruits, nuts, and pet food. They establish nests in ivy, Pampas grass, blackberry bushes, Italian cypress, juniper buses or other heavy shrubbery, star jasmine vines, and in woodpiles, storage boxes, or yard and garden enclosures.

Norway Rats (or Sewer Rat, Brown Rat, or Wharf Rat) are generally found in agricultural areas, creeks and sewers. They are more aggressive and larger than the Roof Rat, weighing as much as a pound. They usually live in underground burrows and feed on garbage, pet food, cereal grains and vegetables. Norway Rats burrow along the outside walls of homes, in holes under shrubs and vegetation, and under the edges of sidewalks or patios.

How do you know if you have rats?

Rats leave up to 50 droppings a day. Look for them in forced air heating ducts or around the water heater or furnace area in the garage. Rats can gnaw through just about anything. Listen for gnawing sounds at night in the attic, subfloor and walls. Mice are much quieter. If you hear gnawing sounds, it's probably rats.

How do they get into the house?

Rats can squeeze through a half-inch hole. Think of the possibilities! Eighty-percent enter through broken or loose screen foundation vents or cracks around garage doors. Once under the house they run along pipes or electrical wires to find openings to get through. There isn't any shortage of them.

Another popular port of entry is around the water heater and furnace. It is warm. It has plenty of insulation to make nests. There are pipes and wires going into the walls, and once between the walls, they scurry up to the attic where they have free reign.

What to do to get rid of them

There are three ways to kill rats: poison bait, snap traps, or rat zappers.

Poison. The most potent poison in bait is Brodifacoum. This is available in d-CON® ready mixed baitbits. The same poison is available in bar or block form. These come in four bait-filled trays at Longs, Friedman Bros. and super markets. It takes 5-7 days for the rat to die.

Caution: Poison bait can also kill pets. Even if a cat eats part of a poison-killed rat (or mouse), it could also die.

Snap traps are extremely successful, but they are only for the strong-of-heart for they can get messy. Get the larger size, the smaller are for mice. Use at least six traps at a time. Bait them with bacon, peanut butter, peanut butter rolled in uncooked oatmeal, or chunks of peanut candy like Reese's® or Snickers®. For a few days, bait the traps but do not set them. Get the rats used to a few free lunches before doing them in.

Place the traps along runways where you see droppings, and behind the water heater, and in the attic. Place the narrow edge of the trap containing the trigger against a wall.

Dispose of the dead critters by dropping them into a zip lock bag, sealing it, and putting it in the trash. Wear rubber gloves. By the second week, you should see few if any rats in your traps. You've got them all.

Rat zappers look like a short three-inch wide tube connected with wires to a kids lunch bucket. The bucket holds six C-cell batteries. Place the unit along a wall where droppings are sighted. The rat enters the tube to get the bait and is zapped. No blood, no guts. Empty the tube into a zip lock bag, re-bait the tube, turn on the switch and set up the zapper for the next kill.

What about the smell?

You dispose of trapped or zapped rats before they start to smell. Poisoned rats may hide inside the walls and die there. Not much you can do except wait it out. There is an odor neutralizer called Ozeium (not certain about the spelling) that comes in a pressurized can. Locate the center of the smelly area and spray Ozeium into the nearest wall plugs.

Commercial and independent pest control companies can also spray into the walls, which is probably the most effective way of combating odors.

How to make sure they don't return

Think about it. Rats want food (an ounce a day), water and a place to nest. Pet food left out overnight is a pure invitation, as is fallen fruit and nuts left on the ground, or birdseed scattered about. Dripping faucets are an ideal water source. Trash left around, particularly rags and newspapers, provides nesting materials.

Be sure you get rid of all rats in the house before you seal it up. Jam steel wool (not brillo pads) into the openings around pipes under sinks and toilets. Seal up the cracks around garage doors. Be sure screens are tight on all foundation vents.

This is a community-wide concern

You may not have rats. . .or you may just think you don't. If your neighbor has them, you probably do too. If one neighbor gets aggressive with controlling rats, the pesky little rodents will find a more hospitable home. This is one case where it doesn't pay to leave it to your neighbor to solve the problem. You just might inherit it.

Chantarelle now has a neighborhood rat control program in place. Creekside and Temelec are also establishing their own rat control programs.

The problem is real.

The proliferation of rats in the entire state is almost unprecedented due to ideal breeding conditions and a cutback in county control efforts. It is understood that the fire departments in the county stopped baiting sewers a number of years ago due to a cutback in funding. Several homeowners have had rats in their yards while others had or have them in their homes, attics and/or garages. Some have set traps and poisoned bait to control them while others have sought professional help.

Why are rats a problem?

They spread diseases. They are a potential threat to pets. They are constantly gnawing at wood, insulation, drywall, concrete and have been known to gnaw through rafters and studs. They gnaw the insulation off electrical wires creating a potential fire hazard. They should be listed on a seller's disclaimer form when you sell your home. This affects the salability, hence value, of your property.

Pest Control: What is being done about the rats

A professional pest control company installed 37 rat bait stations in designated locations throughout Chantarelle in March 1999. They service these each month.

Bait stations were placed every 150 feet around the entire perimeter of Chantarelle, that is along the common walls with Country Meadows, Seven Flags, and Creekside, along the soundwall fences on Arnold Drive and Watmaugh Road, and along the common fence surrounding the central common area. These stations arelocked shut and securely fastened to the ground. They are baited with a multi-feeding anti-coagulant, such as diphacinan. The stations are child and pet proof. The holes are small enough for several rats to feed at a time, but too small for any pet to access. The rats return to feed several times and will bleed to death in five or six days. Rats travel within a hundred-foot radius from their nests.

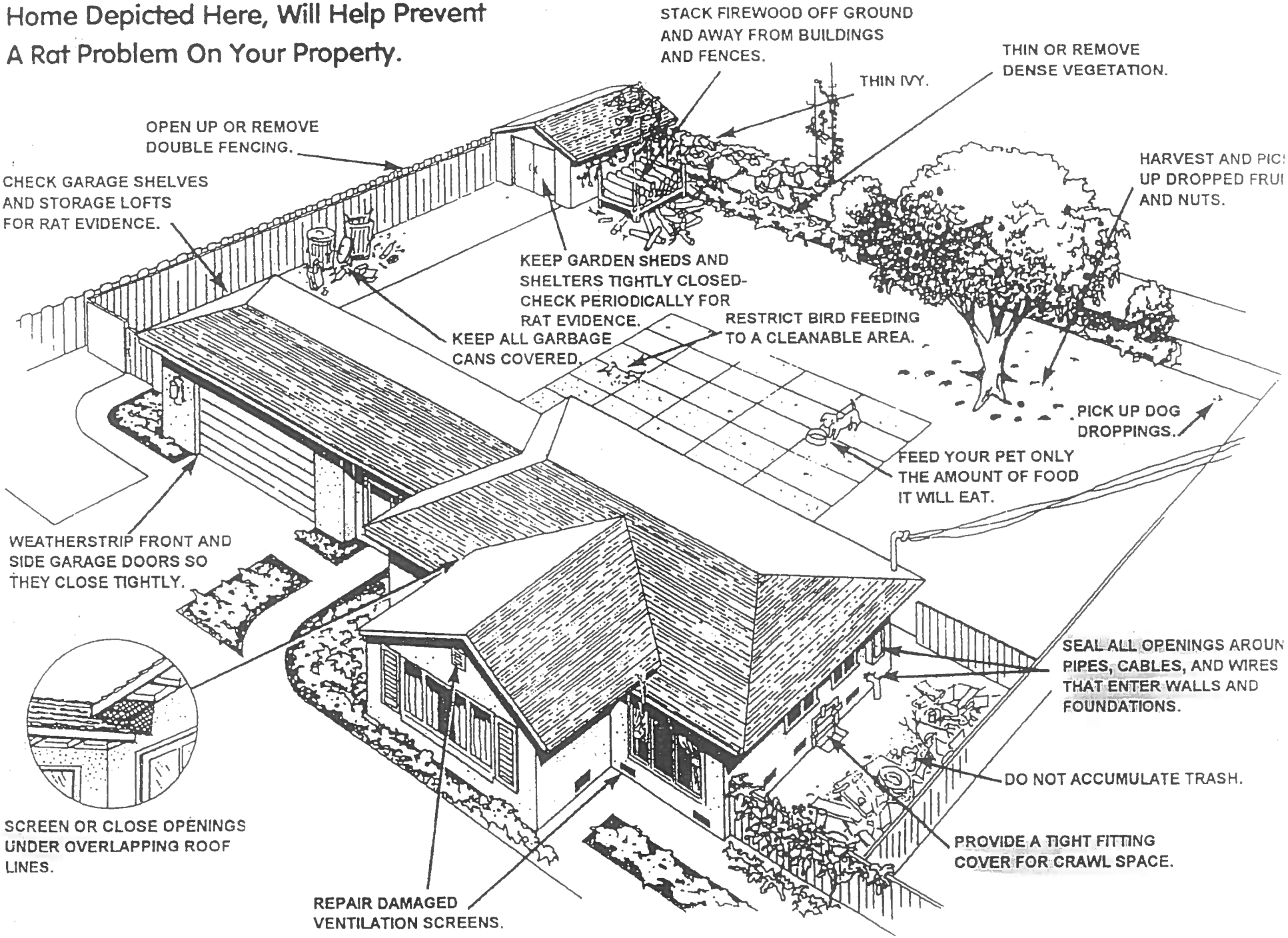
This program is a considerable help in controlling rats in individual homes. But, it is not the total solution. Residents who have bird-feeders, leave pet food out at night, stack firewood against their house, have foundation vents not tightly nailed down, have not plugged up all pipe entrances to their houses with steel wool and foam insulation, have cracks or openings a half-inch or larger around their garage doors, have swinging pet doors or leave their garage doors ajar so cats can come and go, significantly increase the chances that they still may get rats.

The following two companies are being used by some of our residents and are satisfied with their services:

Clark Pest Control
3215 Brickway Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
935-6619

Nature Works
P.O. Box 2457
San Rafael, CA 94912
578-6900

Close Attention To The Areas Of Your Home Depicted Here, Will Help Prevent A Rat Problem On Your Property.



DOMESTIC RODENTS

NORWAY RAT

(Rattus norvegicus)

The Norway Rat is sometimes called the Sewer or Burrowing Rat. It is usually brown on back and sides with gray to white belly. It is distinguished by its broad and heavy body and blunt muzzle. The ears are small and close set and covered with short hair. The average weight is 10 to 17 ounces and the length from tip of nose to end of tail about 12 to 18 inches. The length of the tail is shorter than combined length of head and body. Females breed at 3 months. Gestation period is 25 days. Litters are spaced at about 60 to 65 days and the average litter is 6 to 14.

The Norway Rat is an omnivorous feeder, but prefers garbage, meats, fish and grains.

ROOF RAT

(Rattus rattus)

The Roof Rat is sometimes called the Tree Rat. It is black to slate gray both on back and belly. The body is slender with pointed muzzle. The ears are large and prominent with no hairy covering. The average weight is 4 to 12 ounces and the length from tip of nose to end of tail is 13 to 17 inches. The breeding habits are about the same as the Norway Rat except the average size of a litter is 6. Roof Rats are omnivorous feeders but prefer vegetables, fruits, nuts and cereal products. Both of these rats require about 1 ounce of water per 24 hour period. They require 3/4 to 1 ounce of dry food per 24 hour period.

HOUSE MOUSE

(Mus musculus)

The House Mouse resembles the Roof Rat in miniature. The body is slender and has a pointed muzzle. The tail is about as long as the combined length of head and body. They measure about 6 to 7 1/2 inches from tip of nose to end of tail. The weight is about 1/2 to 3/4 ounces. Female breeds at age of 6 weeks. Gestation period is 17 days. Litter averages about 5 or 6. Female may produce as many as 6 litters during lifetime. Life expectancy is up to 1 year. Mouse dropping are small and rod shaped, where as droppings of Roof Rat are medium and spindle shaped, and those of the Norway rat are large and capsule shaped. Mice prefer cereal grains, yet they are omnivorous feeders. They require little or no water. They are able to extract water from dry food.

Pest Control: Termite Control

I recently had a termite and pest report done on our house, just as a precautionary step. I didn't expect any problems, but wanted to make sure. The only area of concern was one I would never have thought of. It had to do with my redwood deck. Most decks are made by nailing or screwing redwood 2 x 6s on top of joists. There is usually a quarter-inch or so space between those 2 x 6s. Leaves, dust and other debris fall down those cracks and collect on top of the joists. Unless that debris is removed, it can cause those joists to dry rot at those points. Fortunately, the small areas of dry rot on my deck were not serious enough to cause any structural damage, at least, not yet. Use a strong forceful stream from a garden hose to flush out those cracks between the deck planks. Concentrate where they intersect with the joists. Use a putty knife at those points where you suspect you didn't dislodge all the debris. It stands to reason that the more plants you have on or near the deck, the more likely you are to have a potential problem. It is a simple enough treatment to help prevent a major problem down the road.

Recycling: Miscellaneous stuff

Recycling makes sense now more than ever. In this age of water shortages, rolling blackouts, and $2.00-a-gallon gas, we're reminded that our earth's precious resources are indeed finite. All of us should do whatever we can to help, and believe it or not, recycling contributes more than we think.

Sorting through your recycling material

Many folks think that newspaper is the only thing we can put out to be picked up and recycled. Not so! The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency says we can put all kinds of recyclables in the blue can.

- Cans and Foil: Yes - Aluminum cans and foil, tin, steel, and bi-metal cans, aerosol cans (empty), lids from jars.
- Paper: Yes - Cardboard, junk mail, paper bags, 6-pack cartons, cereal boxes, cracker boxes, Kleenex boxes, paperbacks, phone books, egg cartons, frozen food packaging, corrugated boxes, magazines, catalogs. No – Food-contaminated paper, hardcover books, or photos.
- Plastics: Yes – All shapes and sizes of containers. No - Plastic bags or Styrofoam.
- Glass: Yes - Food and beverage containers. No – Window glass or mirrors, ceramics, or light bulbs.

Empty containers only. Flatten or cut cardboard boxes. Set out the blue can at least two feet away from other cans or objects.

Toxics

The Agency holds their annual hazardous material roundup in Spring, where we can dispose of excess toxic materials (see the next section for instructions), but the Agency urges us to be conscious of toxic materials all year long. They suggest we learn about alternatives to chemical products. These are usually healthier for us, our pets, and our environment.

- We should reduce our need for yard and garden pesticides.
- We should avoid products marked poison or danger.
- We should recycle our used motor oil, which Sonoma Garbage will pick up if it's in special containers, which they provide.
- We should use biodegradable cleaners.
- We should buy these products only in quantities we can reasonably use.

- In the Garden: Commonly used pesticides often affect more than just pests in and around our homes. They can get into local creeks, sometimes at levels that can harm sensitive aquatic life.
- The Agency suggests these tips to help create a healthier pest management environment in our yards.
- Build healthy soil by adding compost of aged manure and slow-release organic fertilizers.
- Learn to use non-chemical products to control pests, such as Teflon tape for root weevils, or soap and water solutions for aphids.

If you have your own lawn, try leaving the grass clippings on it, rather than rake them up. They decompose quickly and release valuable nutrients back into the soil.

The Waste Management Agency provided most of the material for this article. For more information, you can reach them at 707-565-3375, or online atwww.recyclenow.org.

Recycling: The Toxic Waste Roundup

I bet you have a lot of household toxic waste material around the house that you need to dispose of safely. Why not clean out your garage, the utility room cabinet, and under your sinks and take that waste material up to the Veterans Hall Saturday, during the Household Toxics Roundup, usually in the Spring. There is no charge. The Hall is at 126 First Street, uphill from the Plaza. To find out the exact date this year, call 527-3375 weekdays between noon and 3 pm.

Many folks often throw toxic materials into their regular trash because it is so easy. The trouble is, what is easy for us, is hard on the ecologic health of the land. Here is a list of common household toxic materials that should be taken to the Roundup:

- auto batteries
- small alkaline and ni-cad batteries such as in clocks, radios etc.
- fire extinguishers
- unbroken fluorescent bulbs
- all paint products
- small propane/helium tanks such as used in barbecues
- medical syringes and needles
- cleaning fluids and solvents
- None of these should be put into our regular trash barrels.

The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency holds a Household Toxics Roundup only once a year in Sonoma. Their only restriction is they will not accept explosives, ammunition or radioactive materials. Pack your toxic waste in sealed containers and transport them carefully. Let's give Mother Earth a break.

Roofs: Extending the life of shake roofs

A shake roof can last up to fifty years when properly taken care of. In Chantarelle, this is especially important because, if our roofs need replacing, we can no longer use shakes. They are considered fire-hazardous. We would have to use an alternative roofing material that would not be as attractive as our shakes.

Just how good are our roofs? They are probably no better or no worse than any typical tract house built in the late 1980s. We do know the shakes were fastened with staples, which some roofers feel are inferior to nails, and some of these staples are coming loose

It is the roofing felt (what we used to call tar paper) that keeps the water out. The shakes only protect the felt from the destructive rays of the sun. Shakes fail when they crack, splinter or develop excessive curls. These are prone to break when walked on or when struck by falling branches. Fortunately, it is not too difficult or expensive to replace a few failed shakes. It is best to have it done by a professional roofer, however.

In order to get fifty years out of our roofs, the shakes should be treated every five years or so with a wood preservative, such as Thompson's Water Seal. This is usually sprayed on using a hand-held sprayer. Mildew can develop on the north and east sides of your roof turning some of the shakes green. These should be scrubbed with a bleach solution to kill the mildew before treating with a preservative. It doesn't hurt to pressure wash the shakes the first time you apply a preservative, but it should not be necessary on subsequent applications.

Gutters and flashing deserve attention too. Flashing, the galvanized steel strips around the roof's perimeter and down the valleys, need to be painted every five years or so to keep them from rusting. If you have a roofer spray preservative on your shakes, it makes sense to have him clean and spray the flashing with a rust-inhibiting paint such as RUST-OLEUM while he's up there.

Gutters clog up with dirt, sawdust, leaves and twigs. These often wash down the gutter toward the downspouts and clog them. The trapped water, unable to flow down the downspouts, can rust out the gutter. All gutters should be cleaned out each year. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, Friedman Brothers sells a gutter scooper. Be sure to wear heavy leather gloves. Any gutter's life can be extended by spraying its insides with a rust-inhibiting paint.

If you want to put in leaf strainers at the top of the downspouts, be sure it is made of stainless steel, not copper. Copper will set up a corrosive reaction that will eat away at the gutter.

Does all this sound like overkill? Maybe not, when you think about it. You should also probably have your roof pressure-washed and sprayed with a preservative by a professional roofer on a regular basis. The roofer can also paint your flashing and gutters. This procedure is recommended every five years, but subsequent applications should be cheaper since they don't require washing.

Most window washers will give your gutters their annual cleaning. For a modest cost per year, you should be able to add 20 to 30 years to your roof's life, and keep water out of your home.

Showerheads: Got a dripping shower control? Is it hard to operate?

Does your showerhead drip? Is the control knob hard to push in or out, or hard to turn? If so, the stem operated by the control knob needs to be replaced. Fortunately, it is not something you need to have a plumber do. All you need is a small slotted screwdriver, a Phillips screwdriver, a pair of pliers and a crescent wrench.

Friedman Bros. carries the replacement part. It is a Price Pfister part "2315 Stem." Its other name is Avante Cartridge. This stem controls the flow of the water, the water temperature, and serves as the shutoff washer. It has a slight coating of lubricant that helps it slide easily inside the valve.

You first have to turn off the water supply where it comes into the house. Once turned off, turn on the shower to drain off any water in the pipe.

To remove the old stem, you first need to remove the plastic control knob. Use your fingernails or the small screwdriver to pry loose the plastic cap on the face of the knob. Inside is a Phillips screw that fastens the knob to the stem. Unscrew that screw and pull off the knob. Also pull off the brass decorative sleeve.

You've now exposed the stem which is held in place by a brass fitting. Use the crescent wrench to unscrew that fitting, turning it counter-clockwise. Once you've taken it off, grab the gray plastic tip of the stem with your pliers and pull it straight out. It might take a pretty good yank to do it.

Look at your new stem. Find the plastic ring that has the part number molded into it. Notice the black tab on that ring. Insert the new stem into the valve, making sure that the black tab on the bottom of the stem fits into the slot on the bottom of the valve. Slip the brass fitting back into valve and tighten it. Slip on the decorative sleeve.

Put the plastic control knob back onto the stem being sure the tab on the stem fits into the slot on the knob. Tighten the Phillips screw. Rotate the handle until it is in its middle position. Slip the black plastic button onto the knob being sure the Price Pfsister name is horizontal. Turn your water supply back on and you're in business.

No more drips. No more hard to operate control knob.

Skylights: Those glorious bathroom flycatchers

One of the architectural delights in our homes is the skylight that floods our downstairs bathroom with soft sunlight. It highlights the bathtub with a warm, gentle glow. It also has some not-so-pleasant side effects. But, fortunately, there is a simple cure for them.

First, the problems. The tall shaft between the skylight on the roof and the opening in our bathrooms is a spider's paradise. They like warm, dry, undisturbed areas in which to build their nests and webs. The webs catch flies. Both flies and spiders die and we're left with a collection of webs and carcasses that is nearly impossible to reach and to clean.

A more costly problem is the heat loss. Hot air rises, fills the shaft, and too much of it escapes through the skylight's thin glass. The fuel needed to heat this loss is quite considerable.

The solution is to place white translucent plastic in your ceiling to cover the opening. This keeps much more of the heat inside your bathroom where you want it. And, although it won't prevent spiders from nesting up the shaft, at least they are out of sight.

I bought two 8-foot lengths of simple door molding at Friedman Brothers. You only need about 14 feet of it, but two 8-foot lengths were easier than a 14-footer to bring home in the car. I bought a piece of plastic 24x54 inches at TAP Plastics, 2770 Santa Rosa Ave. in Santa Rosa. It was 1/8 inch thick and has a medium-dense translucency.

I cut the molding, mitered the ends, and nailed it to the ceiling making a frame around the opening. Use finishing nails. Also, use a T-square to make sure the frame is perfectly square, because the opening may not be. Make the inner edge of the frame overlap the hole 1/2 inch on all four sides. This lip is what will support the plastic.

I trimmed the plastic using a radial arm saw so as to fit within the opening and to rest on the frame's lip. If you want, you could measure your opening and TAP will trim the plastic to your exact measurement. If so, get it cut a total of 1/2 inch less than the opening. For example, if the opening is 23 by 52 inches, have the plastic cut to 22 1/2 by 51 1/2 inches.

Either way, it will take a little maneuvering to get the plastic up through the opening and to rest on the lip. It should have about 1/4 of lip on each side. I countersunk the

nails, filled the holes, caulked the edges of the frame, primed it and painted it with the same semi-gloss paint as the bathroom ceiling. (I actually did all this before sliding in the plastic.)

Presto, the room is now filled with an even softer, more-diffused light, the bathroom stays toastier, and who cares how many spider webs are up there as long as you can't see them.

Sliding Windows and Glass Doors: Maintenance issues

One of the nicest features of our houses are the sliding glass doors. They provide light and a sense of openness. That's the good news. The bad news is they are a pretty easy entry point for a burglar.

There are a few things we can do to make them more secure. At the bottom of the door, there is a locking pin that slips into a hole in the bottom of the stationary frame. This provides another lock in addition to the lock on the door's handle. I drilled two more 3/8-inch holes in the bottom of that stationary frame 6 inches and 12 inches away from the original hole. Now we can open the door 6 inches and lock it so it can't be opened further. We can also lock it open 12 inches. We get fresh air, but no one can slip in.

Many people cut a length of broom stick or piece of 1x2-inch board the right length to fit into that bottom track. This makes it nearly impossible for someone outside to slide the door open.

The doors are very heavy, but it is possible to raise them up off the bottom track and lift them out completely. You can keep someone from doing this by drilling two small holes on the upper frame of the door on the indoors side. Screw in sheet-metal screws with the heads protruding just enough to keep the door from being able to be lifted out. Make the holes just below the upper groove so that the door will travel freely. When you want to remove the door yourself, unscrew the screws.

Our sliding windows have adjustable loose clips that can keep the windows from being opened too far. These aren't too terribly reliable, however. Cut quarter-inch dowling (available in 3-foot lengths at Friedman Bros.) the right length and drop them into the bottom groove, just like the broom stick on the sliding door mentioned above. That will really keep the window from being slid open from the outside. The sliding windows are very easy to lift out and permit an unwanted person to enter. The protruding screws suggested for the sliding door will work very well for the windows too.

By the way, the bottom tracks of both windows and doors need a little maintenance. To clean the tracks, spray household cleaner on a cloth, wrap the cloth around the tip of a screwdriver, and move the padded tip back and forth along the track. Repeat this a few times until the cloth comes out clean. Use powdered graphite or silicone spray to lubricate the tracks. Don't use oil for it attracts dirt, which makes matters worse.

Smoke Alarms: An alarming thought about our smoke alarms

Our homes all have either one or two smoke alarms depending on the model home we own. These are safety devices we hardly ever give thought to, but they do deserve checking now and then.

The smoke alarms in our homes are hard-wired, meaning they are connected to the house's electricity. Each alarm has a clear glass test button visible from the floor. A red light flashes inside that glass button approximately every 60 seconds. If you stare at the button long enough, it should flash red. This means the electricity is getting to it.

The next test is to see if the alarm works. Climb up on a chair and press the button for four or five seconds. You should hear the familiar horn alarm sound. This means your alarm is working. That's all you need to do. If you'd rather not climb up on a chair, press the button with a broomstick.

The manufacturer suggests we test the alarm each week. Realistically, it would seem once a quarter should be often enough.

Occasionally we read in the paper about people burned to death in their homes, yet the home had a smoke alarm. How come? Maybe their smoke alarms were connected to the house's electricity, as are ours. It's also possible they had an electrical fire that tripped the circuit breaker that powered their smoke alarm? The result—they had a fire, but no alarm. Now, that's an alarming thought!

Newer smoke alarms have a back-up battery inside the unit that sounds the alarm if a fire interrupts the electrical power. These alarms were available when our homes were built, but were more expensive, and were not required by the then-existing building code. Presley may have been thrifty, but legal.

Friedman Brothers carries a Jameson #02010 battery back-up alarm, including a battery. It signals when the battery needs replacement and has a limited ten-year warranty. (By the way, Jameson is the manufacturer that made our current alarms.) Friedman Brothers also carries a CODE ONE 2000 Model AD battery back-up alarm. It has a limited five-year warranty and does not include a battery. However, it is both a smoke and a fire alarm. Replacing your present alarm with either of these units takes less then fifteen minutes and requires only a screwdriver. Just be sure to turn off the power to that circuit before you begin. Finally, there is always a cheaper and easier solution. You can buy a battery-only smoke alarm such as the CODE ONE 2000 Model A, which Friedman Brothers also carries, and put it up along side your existing unit.

Storage Sheds: Where to buy and regulations

Some homeowners have asked various board members where they bought the storage shed by the Clubhouse. Thanks to Robyn Makaruk, contact:

California Sheds at 1-800-287-4337 for a free brochure.

Remember, the CC&Rs spell out restrictions on size and location for such structures, and you need to submit plans to the Architectural Review Committee prior to ordering.

Toilets: Replacing your old toilets

Remove the old water tank:

1. Remove the toilet seat so it won't be in the way.
2. Turn off the water supply under the tank. Flush the toilet twice to remove most of the water in the tank. Use a cup to bail out as much more as you can. Use a sponge or rag to absorb the rest.
3. Bail and sponge out the toilet bowl.
4. Place a towel on the floor under the water tank to catch any dripping water. On the outside bottom of the tank, loosen the water supply nut. Gently pull the water supply line from the tank.
5. Remove the two metal nuts that fasten the tank to the bowl. Lift the tank free.

Remove the old toilet bowl:

1. Spread some newspaper on the floor on which to place the removed bowl.
2. Pry off the two plastic caps on the base of the water bowl. Remove the nuts and washers on the hold-down bolts that connect the bowl to the flange in the floor. It may require a little WD-40 to help loosen the nuts.
3. Rock the bowl back and forth to loosen it. Lift the bowl straight up and rest it on the newspaper. It weighs about 70 pounds.
4. Plug up the opening in the floor with a rag to keep dangerous sewer gas from entering the room.
5. Scrape the old wax from the flange being careful none falls down the opening. Clean the vinyl floor since the base of the new toilet may not match the old.

Installing the new toilet:

1. Turn the new bowl upside down on the floor. Gently press the new wax gasket (which comes with the toilet) over the bowl's horn. The wax provides a waterproof seal.
2. Be sure the two hold-down bolts are upright and in the correct place in the flange in the floor. Pull upward on them to make sure they are in the correct position. They should not lift off. If they do, rotate them a quarter-turn and try again.
3. Remove the rag plugging the hole. Turn the bowl upright and lower it so that the bolts come through the holes. Press down, twisting the bowl slightly until it no longer rocks. This sets the wax seal. Use a carpenter's level to make sure the bowl is level with the floor.
4. Put the washers and nuts on the hold-down bolts and hand-tighten them alternately to prevent cracking the bowl.

5. Pour water into the bowl and check for leaks. Fill the plastic caps with putty and press them down over the bolts. Seal where the base of the bowl meets the floor with tub and shower caulk to keep out dirt.

Installing the new water tank:

1. Rest the tank on the toilet and line up the bolt holes.
2. Slip the bolts with the rubber gaskets down through the holes and attach the washers and nuts from below.
3. Tighten the nuts alternately to keep the tank from cracking. When secure, the tank should rest firmly and rigidly on the bowl.
4. Reattach the water line and tighten the water supply nut. Turn on the water and check entire system for leaks. It's a good idea to also check for leaks after a few hours and again after a few days.

Windows: Double-pane windows can be a pain

Chances are you've noticed a hazy film or even moisture forming between the glass panes in your windows or glass sliding doors. It is unsightly and reduces their energy efficiency. That's bad enough, but you'll be shocked at how much it will cost you to correct the problem.

Double-pane glass, or "insulated glass" as it is technically called, enables architects to design homes with plenty of windows and still meet the energy-efficient requirements of local building codes. They make our Chantarelle homes bright and cozy, but are a costly nuisance when they fail.

Insulated glass is made of two sheets of 1/8-inch thick glass bonded together at the edges with silicone. There is a spacer made of perforated aluminum filled with absorbant beads around the perimeters between the two panes. The air in between the glass sheets is pumped out and (in good quality windows) argon gas pumped in. Glass itself is a poor insulator, but the dead space between the two sheets is an excellent one.

Insulated glass fails when the silicone seal breaks. This lets the gas between the sheets out, and air and moisture move in to fill the void. Soon there is more moisture than the beads can absorb. More gas leaks out. More moisture comes in until eventually the entire window has condensation. It will never get better. You might say your window is dead.

What causes a seal to break? Silicone weakens as it expands and contracts every day. Ultra-violet rays weaken it. Rain runs down the window and eats away at the seal. Every time we slam a window shut, it jars the seal. Birds fly into them. Window washing fluids can eat away at the silicone. It is not uncommon for insulated windows to fail within ten years. We've been here getting close to that and the odds are catching up with us.

The warranty on our windows and sliding glass doors has expired, so if you need replacements, some of our homeowners have successfully used a local company to do it:

Clear Image Glass
19655 Arnold Drive.
Sonoma, CA
939.9374

Washing Machines: Better check your washing machine hoses

We have all heard tales of horror from folks whose washing machine hose burst and gushed out water for hours before being noticed. Fortunately, our washing machines are all on the first floor, but the accumulated water could still damage sheet rock, insulation, vinyl floors, sub-floors, base boards and possibly even framing inside the walls. State Farm Insurance says that "in a single hour, a broken washing machine hose can leak up to 500 gallons of water." That's the same as dumping nine barrels of water per hour on your utility room floor. Ouch!

There are simple steps we can take to minimize the chance of that happening. Unless you've bought a new washing machine since moving here, your hoses are at least eight or nine years old and may need replacing.

Here is how to check their condition. Turn the faucets on, then off, then on again. Feel to see if the connections and hoses are dry. If the connections are leaking only a little bit, try tightening them with groove-joint pliers. Then run your hand up and down the length of the hoses. Look for brittleness or hardness near the connections, or soft spots, or for any kinks. If you are the least bit suspicious, disconnect the hoses and take them to an appliance dealer for a replacement. If one is bad, you might as well replace both of them.

It is safer to get the manufacturer's hoses than bargain generic ones. They are more likely to withstand the heat and pressure. Also, if the original hoses were held in place with spring clamps, invest a dollar or two and buy worm-drive hose clamps. Be careful not to over-tighten these, however. You may also use a steel-braided water heater hose that is much stronger and takes the heat better. Friedman Bros. carries these hoses in a 24-inch length.

Finally, it goes without saying that it's a good idea to turn off the water valves every time you're finished washing, or at least turn them off when you leave the house. You're still not completely safe. It is possible for a valve inside the machine to stick open and flood water, but only a qualified service man can determine that for you.

Water Heaters: Installing safety straps on your water heater

One of the travails of selling a home in this day of exhaustive disclaimers and stringent building codes. Our water heaters have a safety strap that securely anchors them during an earthquake. When our homes were built, a single strap around the middle was all that the code required, and it could be nailed to studs rather than bolted.

Since the Loma Prieta quake, Sonoma County, as have many others, beefed up the code. We now must have two straps – one a third of the way down from the top, and the other a third of the way up from the bottom. And, these must be anchored to the studs with bolts.

When we sell our homes, we have to bring them up to code, which means we must have two straps, and they must be bolted. You have two choices. You can wait until you sell and do it then, or you can do it now and have the added protection in the meantime. I called the County to verify all this and, sure enough, this is correct.

Friedman Bros. has a kit called simply, "Water Heater Safety Strap." It consists of two stainless steel straps, brackets to bolt to the studs, the necessary bolts, and the nuts and bolts to attach the straps to the brackets. The package modestly says, "Installs in 10 minutes." Don't believe it! Although I have not installed them here, I have in another house, and it took the better part of an afternoon.

First, the County does not require stainless steel straps, although they certainly are more durable. Our water heaters are currently held in place with plumbers tape - a galvanized strap with holes in it. These meet code.

The building inspector said most people leave the present strap where it is and add the two required ones. It will be a bear of a job to do because the enclosure is extremely small and our water heaters are so close to the furnace. Getting inside and finding room to work would be a challenge. This is one job it might be best to have done.

Window Ledges: How to correct sagging window ledges

I wanted to dress up the window ledges outside our kitchen windows with window boxes filled with flowerpots. I noticed that some of the ledges were sagging and I was afraid to add the weight of the window boxes without shoring them up.

It is not surprising the ledges were drooping. They are supported by 2x8s toenailed to the siding. They are not anchored anywhere near securely enough. The top of the 2x8 supports pull loose from the siding, causing the ledge to slant down away from the house. It was a relatively easy job to jack them up and anchor them properly, and not very expensive. Once properly supported, they should never sag again.

First, see if you have a problem. Look to see if any of your ledges slant down. If in doubt, use a level to be sure. Count the supports that need to be strengthened. I had six. Friedman Brothers has 2x8 joist hangers. You'll also need galvanized joist hanger nails. These are strong enough to withstand the shear stress, yet short enough to not go through the 2x8s.

I used my hydraulic car jack to raise up the outside edge of the ledge. Put a block of wood under the jack to keep it from sinking into the soil. By putting the level on top of the ledge, I could tell exactly how high to jack it up. When level, I nailed the joist hanger to the house siding, then to the support itself. I repeated this procedure until all six of my drooping supports were nailed in place. These are anchored far more securely than they ever were.

Unfortunately, I haven't any excuse now when Betty asks me to stand on the ledges and wash the windows.