

# HOME HELP

How to keep chimneys bee-free and borders beautiful all year round

**Q** We have a swarm of honeybees in our disused chimney, which is difficult to access. Local beekeepers are reluctant to get involved because of the access issue. I'm told that it will require scaffolding and a specialist who can Hoover the bees out. Who can I call?

Roger Birtwistle, Norfolk

**A** When swarms of bees settle in disused chimneys, they don't normally cause problems. Honeybees are not usually aggressive; their priority is to forage and grow. They don't damage the brick, but they will build wax comb, which can be a problem if the chimney is ever opened up again for use. Left alone, they are normally forgotten.

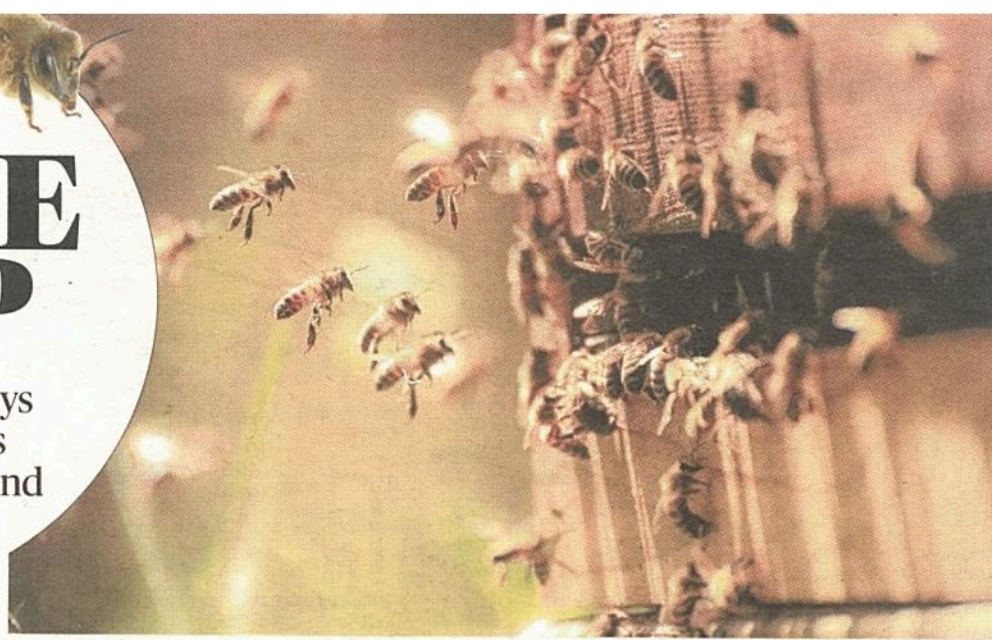
A lot of honeybee colonies in chimneys do not survive their first winter, due to pests and diseases. If they do die out, that is an ideal time to call in a builder to dismantle, clean up and rebuild. Disused chimneys can have a plate put over the pot to stop bees coming back.

Vacuuming will remove the bees, but leave residual comb, which lures future swarms; it may become a regular event. Removing all the comb, cleaning the internal brickwork and putting in a cap of insect mesh to prevent returning swarms should do the trick.

Martyn Belcher, of Mansfield Honey Bees (mansfieldhoneybees.co.uk), does removals, aims to save all bees and would travel to Norfolk; he typically charges £450 for four hours' work. The stinging bees are gently sucked (not killed) into a box with a vacuum; then he removes the comb with the queen, eggs and juveniles by hand. All the bees are taken to Martyn's apiary. If the nest is lower in the chimney, more building work may be required.

Stewart Spinks, the Norfolk Honey Company; norfolk-honey.co.uk

**Q** My new car doesn't fit easily into my garage, which has an



WILLIAM JONES-WARNER, DON FARELL/GETTY IMAGES

## PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

### HOW CAN I MAKE FRILLS, VALANCES AND PELMETS LOOK TASTEFUL?

**Q** I am strangely fond of fabric embellishments from my childhood: swags, tails, valances and pelmets. How can I use these in my decor in a tasteful, modern way?

T Levine, London

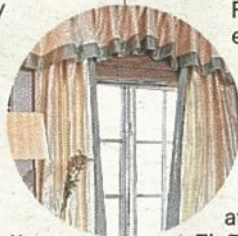
**A** The 1980s fashion revival is filtering down into interiors: button-back seat pads with fabric ties on kitchen chairs; frilled valances on divan beds matching the window pelmets; upholstered tissue-box covers. In the 1980s, fussiness was ramped up, with a plethora

of Liberty, Sanderson and Laura Ashley florals against pastel paints. Minimalists will hate this look's return, but fabric with pattern and colour can be cosy and comforting. Here's a guide to pulling it off.

Ensure fabrics are not flat and shiny. This can make the look dated in a "cheap suit" sort of way. Better to have a visible weave.

Embrace the new take on bold florals. Wild woven botanicals from Fanny Shorter, Christopher Farr and Designers Guild are a world away from repeated roses. Dress a bed with a counterpane and circular button-back cushions.

Use different colourways of the same fabric to dilute the matchy-matchy feel. And choose where you apply this style. Swags and tails only work on tall windows.



If you have a small room with low ceilings, reupholster the sofa instead. If a frilled valance is too much, try a box pleat.

For a contemporary edge, upholster in a geometric print instead of a floral. The 1980s Memphis trend is being referenced by Jon Burgerman, at Kirkby Design, and ZigZagZurich. Tamasyn Gambell's geo fabrics, in considered colourways, would also look fantastic on pleats and pelmets.

Or go bold by shopping at House of Hackney, where the wildly patterned furniture is trimmed with fringing that matches the floor lamps.

Need more inspiration? Make notes at Kit Kemp's hotels before embellishing your own home.

Hannah Cork, interior stylist; hannahcork.com

**Q** up-and-over door. There is barely an inch of free space on either side. Is it possible to enlarge the entrance?

Mark Carroll, Essex

**A** The garage door can be enlarged, subject to the size of the lintel bearing either side of the opening. You need a lintel that spans the width of the door, plus at least 100mm if it is made of steel. If it is a Catnic (cavity tray) type, a minimum bearing of 150mm is needed. If lintels of this size aren't in place, a new beam will be required to span the opening. Get an engineer to check the loading from above in order to design the correct type of support based on the new size. Expect to pay £2,500 for an engineer and building work. If a standard garage door fits the new opening, that will cost £300-£400; for a bespoke size, you're looking at up to £1,000.

Nic London, managing director, N London Construction; nlonconconstruction.co.uk

**Q** This spring, I had loads of bluebells in my border. They're dying now. How do I manage them so they come up next year, but don't leave bare patches in my border until then?

D Haven, London

**A** There are two types of bluebell: the English bluebell, with scented dark purple/blue blooms aligned on one side, is a keeper; the Spanish bluebell, which has pale blue flowers in whorls around the stems, is an invasive weed.

Choosing bedfellows that thrive in the same "woody" conditions, but flower at different times, is the key to keeping your garden colourful. Cranesbill geraniums will cover the spent bluebell tops and mask the fading foliage; they flower for months. Good ones include the azure G 'Rozanne' and G 'Kashmir White'. For height, plant foxgloves such as the raspberry-ripple 'Pam's

Choice'. It gently self-sows and looks after itself. For autumn colour, *Hesperantha coccinea* 'Major' has crimson flowers that blend with the tinting leaves on the trees.

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

**Q** I ordered several bars of soap on Amazon. I don't like them. Who will take the unopened ones?

Heather D, London

**A** Take them to your local food bank: its clients often need toiletries as well as food.

Liz Aitken and Julia Durand, professional organisers, Carefully Sorted; carefullysorted.com

## DO YOU NEED HELP FROM ONE OF OUR EXPERTS?

Email your questions to [homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk). Advice is given without responsibility

