

Expert advice

DIY DILEMMAS

Big Strong Boys' Jake Robinson answers your DIY questions and this month provides a step-by-step guide to installing a curtain pole



JAKE ROBINSON

WHY DOES OUR KITCHEN SOCKET KEEP SPARKING?

We have just had our kitchen tiled, and since then we have noticed that one of our kitchen sockets keeps sparking whenever we put the kettle on. Do you know what may be causing this and is it something that we can fix ourselves without needing to pay an expensive call-out fee to an electrician?
Linda Young, Halifax

Jake says The extent of your problem really depends on how large the sparks are – if they are only quite small then this is fairly normal. If they are larger, then you need to investigate why this is happening. It may be an indication that there's a problem with the kettle that is being plugged in, or it could be a faulty switch. However, as you have recently had new tiling done, your tiler has probably unscrewed the socket when tiling and that's likely to have loosened a cable in the process. You firstly need to turn off the fuse at the main board, unscrew the socket and take a look behind it to see if you can see any obviously loose cables. If you can't, and if the sparks are still appearing once you have screwed the socket back on, then it may be the case that you need a new socket fitted, in which case you will need to call out an electrician to install one for you.

HOW DO I REPLACE A WOODEN RUNNER ON A TOY BOX?

I have a Victorian toy box with a drawer at the bottom. When I opened it last time, the drawer came off its wooden runner and split. Is there any way I can fix the split pine runner or should I just replace it?
Melinda Holmes, Perthshire

Jake says It would be best to replace it. First, mark exactly where the wooden runner sits. Using a chisel, carefully tap in between the carcass and wooden runner to remove it. Sand the area, making sure you don't sand away your markings! Take the old runner to a timber shop where they should be able to cut a replacement to size. Using your markings, attach the new runner. Tap in the pins an inch in either side of the pine or it might split – if it does, you'll have to drill a pilot hole slightly smaller than the pins. Glue the edge to be fixed, place in position and drive the pins in flush to the runner. Let the glue dry for at least an hour, then slide your drawer back in.

MY TOILET WATER BLOCKS UP IN WINTER – WHY?

I live in a ground floor flat and my toilet water doesn't drain away properly. My sink and bath drain OK and this only seems to happen in the winter months – any ideas?
Lucy Henry, Sussex

Jake says Normally there's a soil pipe for the toilet waste, and a separate pipe for the bath and sink. As only the toilet is affected, you may have a blockage close to the main soil pipe. Take a look outside and check the drain grill isn't covered with leaves, which can be a problem in winter. If it's clear, use a plunger so the rubber end covers the base of the pan and pump several times. If the problem persists you can hire a large rodding auger to reach further along the pipe. If this also fails to clear it, you may want to call a plumber.



Send in your DIY queries to

Expert advice, Real Homes, 64 North Row, London W1K 7LL or email Jake at realhomes@hf-uk.com



Jake's guide to...
putting up a curtain pole

You will need to carefully plan installing a curtain pole. Once you've got all your measurements right, the job is relatively easy.

YOU WILL NEED

Your chosen wooden or metal curtain pole, brackets, finials and curtain rings, screws, tape measure, pencil, hand saw, raw pugs, SDS drill (this is a special drill used for masonry)

STEP 1 PLANNING AND MEASURING

It's important to think about how your curtains will hang once they are on the pole. For example, will they conceal a light switch, or cover any electrical sockets?

Curtain poles come in various lengths, but as they're usually supplied in increments of half a metre, they may need to be cut to size. If you need to cut a two-part curtain pole which screws together, you need to saw an alike amount from both ends or you'll end up off-centre. When cut correctly, the supporting bracket will conceal this middle joint, and so it doesn't matter if the two halves don't line up exactly when screwed together. If you have to cut the pole, the pre-drilled holes for the finials (end caps) may be sawn off. Mark the centre of the pole and drill new pilot holes at each end of the pole – this will ensure the finials sit squarely and



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it avoids the screws wandering off-line as you tighten it. Always double check your measurements before cutting!

Measure and mark the centre of the window or door frame on the wall above it and make a pencil mark at the required distance down from the ceiling. Normally this is halfway between the ceiling and the top of the window frame and, if your pole has three brackets, this is where to fix the middle bracket.

STEP 2 FIXING THE BRACKETS

Your curtain pole will normally come supplied with wall fixings. The most common type of bracket is like a large metal 'washer' with three holes for fixing, and a centre screw, which the

Above Curtains are simple to install once you have the correct measurements for the fixtures. Try B&Q for a range of curtain poles

decorative bracket is threaded on to. Make sure you use good-quality raw plugs and at least one metal-type plug to ensure a really secure fixing on to your wall or plasterboard.

Having found the centre of the pole and lined this up with the centre of the window or door frame, measure the distance out to each end, and then subtract 10cm. This is to leave a 10cm gap between the end brackets and the end caps. This gap will accommodate a single curtain ring which prevents the whole curtain sliding when drawing the curtains. Mark the position for each end bracket, remembering to also measure the same distance down from the ceiling as the centre bracket (**fig. 1**). Drill your holes for the brackets

TIPS

- Wrap a wooden pole with a few turns of masking tape on the area you are cutting down, to avoid splintering it as you saw through it.
- Make sure you don't drill a hole in a pipe or electrical cable. You will rarely find pipes and cables around a window area, but always be careful.



as marked, using a SDS drill – other drills will not penetrate the concrete lintel, which you normally find over a window or door opening. You can hire a SDS drill if you don't want to buy one. Insert your raw plugs in to the hole, attach the brackets and then screw in tight (**fig. 2**).

STEP 3 PLACING THE POLE

Slide on all but one of the curtain rings and sit the pole into place on the support brackets. Secure it using the screws located on the underside of the brackets (**fig. 3**). Lastly, add one curtain ring outside each end bracket, and then screw on the finials to complete the job.