

All drain, no pain

Buying the wrong chemical sink unblocker is like flushing money down the drain

Unblocking a sink is an unpleasant job that no one likes to contemplate – except maybe our testers at Which?. But if there's one thing we've learned from our test it's that grabbing the first, or cheapest, bottle of sink unblocker you see is unlikely to do the best job on your drain.

We tested chemical unblockers and mechanical unblockers to see how successfully they can shift kitchen and bathroom blockages, and found that using mechanical methods is not only greener, but it's also more effective than pouring chemicals down the sink.

Even better, the Best Buy mechanical Kilrock Drainblock Buster (1) can be used time and time again – all it needs is

water and a little muscle power. Even the humble £2 plunger (5) did a better job at removing both types of block than most of the chemical products. It cleared pipes in a matter of seconds without our testers breaking a sweat.

If you really want a chemical unblocker, go for our only chemical Best Buy – the Buster Kitchen Drain Clear (7). It's specifically designed for kitchen blockages, and performed far better than any other chemical, clearing fats from sink pipes in a matter of minutes.

We also tested some alternative products you may already have in the house including bleach, soda crystals and even plain old hot water. Soda crystals claim to help keep pipes clear with regular use,



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We've got tips to help clear your sink, and test results for Tesco and Sainsbury's unblockers at www.which.co.uk/sinkunblockers

so we weren't surprised that they failed to clear established blockages in our tests. Hot water also performed poorly on blockages, so we haven't included either of these two methods in our table.

However, on bathroom blockages 500ml of household bleach (12) did as good a job as some of the dedicated unblockers, and it's much cheaper.

Better still, don't let your pipes get blocked up in the first place – follow preventive measures:

■ Avoid pouring fats and oils down the sink – pour or scrape them into a non-recyclable container and bin it.

■ If you do accidentally pour oil down the sink, wash it through immediately with hot water.

■ Use a plughole strainer to catch bits of food rinsed into the kitchen sink, or hair in the shower. You can get them from hardware stores for around £2.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION		WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE (%) ^a
		PRICE (£)	TYPE	KITCHEN BLOCKAGES	BATHROOM BLOCKAGES	SAFETY	SURFACE DAMAGE	CONVENIENCE	
MECHANICAL									
1	KILROCK Drainblock Buster	10	Water pressure	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	90
2	A2000 Pressure Plunger	24 ^b	Gas pressure	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	88
3	POWER PLUMBER Plunger Kit	15	Gas pressure	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	88
4	SILVERLINE Drain Blaster	18 ^c	Pressure pump	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★	86
5	KILROCK Sink Plunger	2	Plunger	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	n/a	★★★★★	78
6	SCREWFIX Drain Unblocker	19 ^d	Flexible rod	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	n/a	★★	77
CHEMICAL									
7	BUSTER Kitchen Drain Clear	3.29	Crystals	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	81
8	ONE SHOT Instant Drain Cleaner	8.49	Liquid	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★	★★★★	72
9	DOMESTOS Sink & Pipe Unblocker	4.00	Gel	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	46
10	MR MUSCLE Sink & Drain Foamer	3.49	Foam	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	44
11	BUSTER Bathroom Plughole Unblocker	2.99	Gel	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	41
HOME REMEDY									
12	DOMESTOS Thick Bleach 24hr (750ml)	1.00	Gel	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	41

^a This ignores price and is based on – **Mechanical unblockers**: performance, 60%; safety, 25%; convenience, 15%. **Chemical unblockers and home remedies**: performance, 60%; safety, 25%; convenience, 10%; surface damage, 5% ^b Includes £6 delivery fee ^c Includes £3.16 delivery fee ^d Includes £5 delivery fee

88% A2000 Pressure Plumber £24

The Pressure Plumber uses gas to clear kitchen and bathroom blockages and it powered through the blockages in our tests in a shot. The print on the canister is small, but the instructions are easy enough to follow and it comes with an adapter that's suitable for use on toilets. We found it required very little force to hold and activate in our tests, so it's easy and effective to use.

Available Lawsonshop.co.uk Clearing method Gas Number of uses Approx 24

which?
BEST BUY

88% Power Plumber Plunger Kit £15

Power Plumber is another sink unblocker that uses gas to clear kitchen and bathroom blockages in one burst. You only need to press down for a second to get a burst of gas and, as the Power Plumber cleared our blockages at the first attempt, there was no need to waste gas by holding it down for longer. It comes with interchangeable heads so you can use it in sinks and toilets. The instructions on the canister are quite small but easy to understand.

Available B&Q Clearing method Gas Number of uses Approx 15

which?
BEST BUY

81% Buster Kitchen Drain Clear £3.29

These crystals are specifically for use on kitchen blockages and cleared them in less than 10 minutes – more quickly and effectively than any other chemical unblocker we tested. You need to remove standing water from above the blockage, so it's difficult if the pipes are completely blocked. This product claims to be usable with septic systems, but isn't suitable for gold-plated fittings.

Available Robert Dyas, Waitrose, John Lewis Active ingredients Sodium Nitrate and Sodium Hydroxide Number of uses Approx six

which?
BEST BUY

which?
BEST BUY

90% Kilrock Drainblock Buster £10

Kitchen and bathroom sink blockages were removed in a matter of seconds by simply filling the Drainblock Buster with water by pulling up the handle and plunging to force the water down through the pipes. Drainblock Buster has two plunger cup sizes so you can use it for sinks or toilets. It's easy to use, doesn't require that much effort to push down the plunger, and because it uses water pressure it can be used over and over again.

Available Robert Dyas Clearing method Water pressure Number of uses Unlimited

How we test

Blocking up the Which? drains

We pit each product against our purpose-built blockages to see if they can clear the obstructions they claim to shift – whether it's a kitchen blockage, bathroom blockage, or both.

For a waterproof kitchen blockage, we combine rice with coffee, vegetable fat and animal fat. We then add 50ml of standing water and attempt to unblock.

For bathrooms, we take a bundle of hair and cotton, and combine with a liquid concoction of hard water mixed with soap and toothpaste.

TYPES OF SINK UNBLOCKER

■ **CHEMICAL** These may be crystals, powder, foam, gel or liquid. The chemical unblockers that worked best on kitchen blockages caused an exothermic reaction – heating up to melt away fats commonly known to block kitchen sinks.

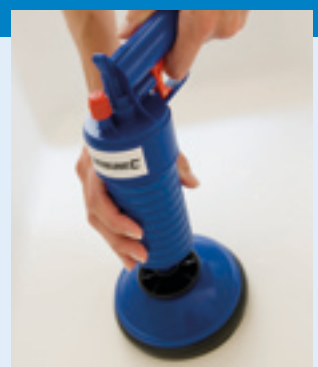
However, the high temperatures may damage certain types of pipe, and some shouldn't be used with septic systems, so always check the warning label on a chemical



unblocker to ensure it's suitable for your pipes and sink, and only use the amount specified in the instructions.

■ **MECHANICAL** These use pressure, whether that's water pressure, as with the Best Buy Kilrock product (1), or pressurised air, as with the Silverline (pictured). Others such as the A2000 (2) and Power Plumber (3) Best Buys use compressed gas.

Models like the Screwfix (6) are different again – it's a reel of flexible rod which you feed down the pipe, and



the corkscrew-style end breaks up the blockage. Some types of mechanical unblockers can also be used on drains and toilets as well as sinks – check the directions on the product for suitability.