



Ask the experts



Roy Jenkinson asks about connecting a DVD player to a TV

DVD and TV link-up

Is there any way I can connect my DVD player to my TV other than using a Scart lead? My old TV doesn't appear to have a socket for a Scart.

ROY JENKINSON, WEST YORKSHIRE

DVD players do generally need a TV with a Scart input. However, it's likely that your old TV will have an RF input where you connect the aerial. If it does, a Scart to RF modulator, which you can buy for around £30 from electronics stores, will convert the signals from your DVD into a form your old TV understands, enabling you to connect the two. You could also try connecting the DVD player to a VCR; this should have a modulator built in, so you can then connect the VCR to the TV.

Next month's 'Focus on' section, on how to get the best out of your TV, will cover connecting up TVs to other pieces of equipment.

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS OR IDEAS FOR 'FOCUS ON...'

You can contact us by email or post

■ letters@which.co.uk

■ Letters, PO Box 44
Hertford X SG14 1SH

Low fat, same calories

When I checked the nutrition labelling on some standard and low-fat packets of custard, I noticed that the calorie content was similar. Is there any point buying the lower-fat version?

ANDREW POWELL, ST HELENS

Reducing fat can diminish flavour, so manufacturers may add more sugar to compensate. Low-fat food can help if you want to reduce your fat intake but not necessarily if you're counting calories. And as some companies charge extra for the low-fat version, you need to read the label closely to find out just what you're getting.

The guidelines defining 'low fat' are not currently legally binding. However, the law is being tightened up and there will soon be a definition of phrases such as 'low fat' and 'lite' that companies will have to abide by. Under the new law, a product that claims to be low in fat but is high in, say, salt or sugar will have to be labelled to this effect.

Meter readings

My stepdaughter is changing electricity supplier. The final bill from her previous supplier is based on estimates. The actual meter shows she's used

less than she's been charged for. Is the company within its rights to base the bill on estimates?

JOHN BROCKLEHURST, BALDOCK

Yes, it can do this even if it's for a final bill. In fact, a third of energy companies' bills are estimates. Electric (and gas) companies are obliged to check your meter only every two years, though many companies do it more often. It's really important to take your own readings when you switch and to call your supplier with the correct readings. Even so, suppliers can still get it wrong. If you feel you're getting an unsatisfactory response and they're not changing your bill, contact the gas and electricity watchdog Energywatch (0845 906 0708; www.energywatch.org.uk).

Running costs of hobs

Is it cheaper to run an electric or gas hob?

FRANK DAVENPORT, WARRINGTON

According to the Energy Saving Trust (EST), it costs about £10 a year to run the average gas hob and around £30 a year for the average electric hob. It recommends you check with your energy supplier to ensure that switching will save you money. To check you're getting the



Frank Davenport asks which is cheaper to run: an electric or a gas hob

cheapest gas and electricity, log on to www.switchwithwhich.co.uk.

When choosing a hob, you also need to consider installation costs and personal preferences. In addition, carbon dioxide emissions from a gas hob are around half those from an electric one. See our October 2006 issue for our most recent test on hobs. For more about saving energy in the home, visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk.

Which? focus

Basic buying advice

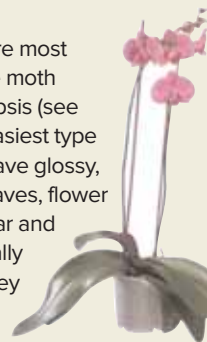
Is there any general advice you can give, to help me choose?

Look at the plants on sale, to check they've been properly cared for, and avoid any whose leaves have gone yellow and/or started to wither. Also, think about where you want to put the plant. If you want it for a poorly lit spot, choose one with dark leaves. Plants with paler green or coloured leaves suit a brighter location. If you want a plant that flowers, choose one that has lots of unopened buds.

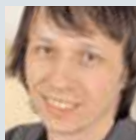
Good for mum

I want to buy my mum an orchid for Mothering Sunday (18 March). Are they difficult to look after?

The orchids that are most often on sale – the moth orchids, Phalaenopsis (see photo) – are the easiest type to care for. They have glossy, tongue-shaped leaves, flower several times a year and are ideal for centrally heated homes. They need to go in a place where there's a good supply of light, out of direct sun, and stand on a tray of wet pebbles, which will moisten the air around them. Water weekly with



Your consumer questions answered by our experts, plus your chance to share your experiences with fellow Which? members



Danny Coope
Horticultural
adviser
Gardening Which?
House plants



Alice Judd
Services
research assistant
Answers this month's questions

Trans fats

Am I right in thinking that it isn't obligatory to state trans fat content on a food label and that trans fats are classed as unsaturated fats?

JACQUES SASSOON, LONDON

You're right that manufacturers don't have to say whether a product contains trans fats unless they're making a claim that relates to

them, such as 'low in trans fats'. You're also right that trans fats are technically a type of unsaturated fat. However, unlike other unsaturated fats, trans fats have a similar effect on blood cholesterol to saturated fat – they can raise the type of cholesterol in the blood that can contribute to coronary heart disease. Some evidence suggests that the effects could be even worse.

Trans fats occur naturally at low

levels in dairy products and meat but also form when vegetable oil or fat is hydrogenated. So look out for hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fats – these must be declared in the ingredients list.

Many companies have removed – or are working to remove – the trans fat from their products. We'd like to see trans fats phased out. Until they are, we think that they should be labelled.

Your say

Share your stories with fellow members

Shopping

From having to put up with music to clothes that go out of stock too soon...we got a mixed bag when we asked for your experiences

What you told us

'It's not so much the service but the general environment that concerns me. More and more shops are now playing background music, at decibel levels ranging from irritating to unbearable.'

DANIELLA, BY EMAIL

'Your February report places the Co-op next to bottom of the league table, but sadly there was no column for stores' "ethical performance", which is the very reason I shop there.'

MITCH, BY EMAIL

'If it weren't for the discount card, I wouldn't go near Currys.'

JEANNE, BY EMAIL

'When I recently phoned the department at the Watford branch of John Lewis that deals with queries about its "never knowingly undersold" claim, the member of staff I spoke to showed a complete lack of enthusiasm to attempt to retain my sale. By contrast, the visit to the store was the complete opposite.'

DAVID, BY EMAIL

'I wish stores would lay off the fashion changes and bring some styles back the next year. Whenever I find something I like in Marks & Spencer, it's never in stock the next season.'

SUE, BY EMAIL

Next month

Buying tickets at ticket booths

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on House plants

When buying a house plant, choose one that has been on display inside – in a garden centre, florists or DIY store, say – not one that's on display outside, such as at a petrol station or on a stall. Before leaving the shop, wrap the plant up to protect it from draughts (for the same reason, don't let tall plants poke out of the roof or window of a vehicle) and avoid long periods in a hot car



rainwater, or use cool water left over after a kettle's boiled, and allow the plant to drain. For best results, use an orchid feed once a month from April to September only. For more information, get your mum to download a copy of *Gardening Which?*'s orchid factsheet: go to www.which.co.uk/gardeningwhich and click on the 'factsheets' link.

One for the children

Can you recommend an easy plant for my ten-year-old?

We'd suggest a cactus or venus fly trap, both of which need a sunny spot. Cacti will put up with some neglect but you do need to water them occasionally. By contrast, venus fly traps love to be over-watered, so are great for eager

children. Stand the pot in a deep saucer with 1 to 2cm of rainwater, or boiled water that has cooled, in the bottom. They don't need feeding (they get all their nutrients from insects and, in fact, fertilisers will kill them) and they catch enough flies of their own so don't need dead ones. Finally, they tend not to last too long, so are good for short attention spans.

Water regularly

How often should I water my plants?

Most house plants need watering all year round – check them at least once a week. Water more liberally in spring and summer, less in winter. Generally, too little water is better than too much, so if a plant is still moist, don't add

more or leave it standing in water. Tepid tap water is fine for most plants but use rainwater or cooled boiled water for orchids and venus fly traps.

Feeding will help

Is it necessary to feed plants?

Extra nutrients will markedly improve plants. From April to September use a food designed for house plants (follow the dosage instructions carefully). Foliage plants will be OK with a general house plant feed but flowering or fruiting plants use up more of the nutrient potassium (potash), so use a tomato feed while they're in bloom, going back to a general feed afterwards. Stop feeding in winter to allow the plant to rest. Never feed venus fly traps.