



Ask the experts



Stewart has a recording problem

Freeview problem

I have a Sony TV with a built-in Freeview receiver, but it will record Freeview channels only if the set is switched on. Is this a design fault or is there a way of recording without having it on?

STEWART CURRIE, LEEDS

This is a disadvantage of some TVs with built-in Freeview receivers – the sets must be switched on for their tuners to work. Also, you can't watch different channels while recording.

Your best option is to buy a cheap set-top box and connect this to your recording device, or you can buy a recording device with its own built-in Freeview receiver. This would allow you to record with the TV switched off or watch a different channel at the same time.

Unsolicited messages

On my last mobile bill, O2 charged me for receiving four unsolicited text messages that advertised ringtones. While it then waived the charge, O2 said it couldn't block future messages as they came from a company with which it had no connection and which had obtained my number from an unknown source. What can I do?

MICHAEL ANDERSON, CARDIFF

This problem is due to reverse-billing, usually the result of calling a premium-rate number. And often you don't know that you're paying.

Text 'Stop' in response to messages you don't wish to receive, which should end the service. Also, always read the terms and conditions before calling premium-rate numbers. If

you don't think you're liable to pay, contact your provider, as it might reimburse the costs. You could also ask for 'premium-rate call barring', so you can't call the numbers that lead to such messages unknowingly.

Car insurance

I would value your opinion on pay-as-you-drive deals. I cover about 6,000 miles a year and don't drive in the rush hour. I have asked Norwich Union for a quote, which seems good, but I know it does depend on where and when I drive.

RICHARD GOODMAN, LAUNCESTON.

There are only a few of these schemes, but they do seem to offer alternatives for people who drive infrequently and outside peak times.

Norwich Union offers this option,

Which? focus Greener gardening

As spring approaches, we help you tend your garden in a more environmentally friendly way

Local plants

I would like to buy plants that are grown locally. How can I check?

Buying locally grown plants cuts down on the environmental cost of transporting them as well as helping support your local nursery.

Some nurseries and garden centres label plants that are grown on site, but otherwise ask where they came from.

Peat alternatives

Should I go peat free?

Peat bogs are a valuable natural habitat for wildlife, but the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says that more than 90 per cent of lowland bogs in the UK

have been damaged or destroyed. Fortunately, there are alternatives.

Peat is not effective as a soil improver or mulch, so opt for mushroom compost, manure or, even better, compost you've made.

If you're a container gardener, choose a New Horizon Organic and Peat Free Growbag, which is a *Gardening Which?* Best Buy and performs well for both flowers and vegetables.

Compost rules

What can and can't I compost?

Plenty of household waste can be composted, including fruit and vegetable scraps,

tea bags and crushed egg shells – but don't compost any meat, cheese or pet excrement, as these attract pests.

All garden waste, including grass cuttings, prunings, leaves and hedge trimmings, can also be recycled by composting.

The *Gardening Which?* Best Buy compost bin is the Rotol Composter. Your council may sell composters cheaply. Also check whether it offers a green waste collection service for excess composting material.

Avoiding pesticides

What are greener alternatives to pesticides?

Pesticides can upset a garden's natural ecological balance and may kill beneficial insects, such as ladybirds, that eat plant pests.

Remember that gardens don't have to be immaculate to look good, so ask yourself whether you really need to kill all weeds, or if digging out the worst yourself is sufficient.

There are also ways to control pests without chemicals. Try the *Gardening Which?* Best Buy Agralan Copper Slug and Snail Tape, or fine mesh such as the Best Buy Enviromesh Ultra Fine to stop many pests reaching crops.

Water efficiency

How can I save water?

Watering efficiently reduces the demand on water reserves and saves cash for those with water meters.

Of course, collecting rainwater in a butt and using it on your garden is a great start, but also



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Richard wants to know more about pay-as-you-drive insurance

claiming savings of up to 30 per cent if you drive less than 6,000 miles a year. More Than also has a pay-as-you-drive policy. However, you should compare quotes against the cheapest conventional policies. Go to www.which.co.uk/carinsurance for details of our Best Buy insurance.

TV repair

Last year, I bought an LCD TV from Comet, but it has broken down and the guarantee is due to expire. My nearest Comet told me to contact the manufacturer so it could assess the problem. Surely, as I bought the TV from Comet, it should do all the running around to get the fault resolved?

STEVE MCLAREN, LONDON

Regardless of the guarantee, the TV should be fit for purpose and of satisfactory quality for a reasonable time – under the Sale of Goods Act – or the seller is in breach of contract and should repair or replace the goods. What is a reasonable time depends on things like the type of goods and the price. In this case, you should insist that Comet deal with your concerns.

Junk mail

My car insurance is due and I'd like a better deal, but last time I searched I was inundated with junk mail, despite being registered with the Mailing Preference Service. How can I avoid junk mail due to searching?

JENNIFER JARRED, YORK

In an ideal world, it would be easier to 'opt in' to receive advertising, but for now you should always have the option of opting out when giving details over the phone or filling in forms on the internet.

Online, this is often done by ticking, or unticking, a box in the small print. On the phone, always ask not to be put on any marketing lists.

Top reads

Each month, we ask you which articles you prefer in *Which?*. Here are the most popular reports from our January issue

- 1 Product reliability
- 2 Premium vs budget food
- 3 Wireless equipment
- 4 Ink cartridges
- 5 Washing machines
- 6 Trades
- 7 House insurance
- 8 Laundry detergents
- 9 Kettles
- 10 Which? family



Top clicks

The 20 most searched-for businesses among your recommendations on www.which-local.co.uk in January

- 1 Plumbers
- 2 Builders
- 3 Electricians
- 4 Heating maintenance and installation
- 5 Car repairs and servicing
- 6 Restaurants
- 7 Roofers
- 8 Bathroom fitters and suppliers
- 9 Painters and decorators
- 10 Carpenters
- 11 Double-glazing suppliers
- 12 Home maintenance
- 13 Computer services
- 14 Country pubs
- 15 Kitchen fitters
- 16 Gardening services
- 17 Aerial installation
- 18 Carpets and flooring
- 19 Butchers
- 20 Dentists

Plumbers are searched for most often on Which? Local



Animal magic

How can I encourage animals into my garden?

Any garden should welcome wildlife. Insects

pollinate plants, eat pests and provide food for birds and amphibians.

Rotting logs provide a home for hedgehogs and insects, and placing prunings under a hedge will give shelter and nesting space to insects, amphibians and small mammals. Wildlife thrives when it's not disturbed, so overgrown areas are ideal for animals such as hedgehogs to rest or hibernate.

Attract birds by offering food on feeders and tables, and put up bird boxes. If you have space, build a pond, which provides water for birds and attracts frogs, newts and dragonflies.

See 'Green-fingered folk', p30.

remember that watering plants with a can is more efficient than a hose; if you do use a hose, control the flow with a trigger. You can also use shower and sink water.

Water early in the morning or late at night so water doesn't evaporate before it reaches roots.

Prioritise your fruit and vegetable patch, which may need more water in the summer, but allow flowers to fend for themselves more often; if a spot is too dry for a certain plant, put something else there instead.

Finally, consider a porous driveway, such as one combining a lawn with a parking space, so rainwater can drain through. Many can be laid above a storage tank so you can use that rainwater yourself.