



ASK AGGIE

Each week, Times Magazine readers put their own domestic goddess queries to our houseproud expert, Aggie MacKenzie.

Q We're moving to a cottage with a septic tank – what detergents are safe to use? For the initial clean I'd like a good blitz involving bleach if possible.

A You must resist the urge! A septic tank needs bacteria to break down all the solid waste products, grease and paper; bleach and other harsh detergents interfere with this process. Think giant gut: digestion in the tank is carried out mainly by microbes excreted from our gastrointestinal tracts; the gases help to stir the sludge, scum and liquid layers that promote digestion of the solids then convert them into liquid. Even excess grease or cooking oil can hugely reduce the efficiency of the system. You see, you really must stick to eco-friendly, alkaline-based cleaning products. There are loads out there, just make sure you check the labels before buying. As a safety measure I recommend you lavish a bit of attention on the tank when you move in: put a dose of Roebic K-37 Septic Tank Treatment down the loo (around £14 for a litre, enough for a 500-gallon tank; call [020 8288 1100](tel:02082881100) for your nearest stockist). It has specially cultured bacteria (and no harsh chemicals) that speed up the waste breakdown. Do this once a year and it will stop the inlet and outlets clogging up and overflowing. Now you wouldn't want that to happen, would you?

Q I washed a cloth soaked with a wood-polishing product in my washing machine. Now the machine smells strongly of wax, and every wash I have done since has come out reeking of wax. How can I get rid of this awful stench?

A Simple. Throw a cupful of white distilled vinegar into the drum, and run the empty machine on a 40-degree cycle. And no, your washing won't smell of vinegar.

Aggie MacKenzie is co-presenter of How Clean Is Your House? Send your questions for publication to aggie.mackenzie@thetimes.co.uk