

# What to DIY

... And what to leave to the pros

The birth of Bunnings and a desire to save bucks has led to a DIY boom in homes. But isn't it ironic that we'll attempt rewiring – something sparkies take years to master – while we hire someone to plan our wedding? Some tasks are prone to going disaster-shaped, so we asked the pros when to play repairwoman, and when to call them in.

## Task How to

### Save that ring from a drain

Check the S-shaped trap under the sink. Not accessible? Hire a plumber. If it is and you want to DIY, consider this: "It's easy to tip the trap the wrong way when taking it apart, meaning the ring gets lost," says Colin Stuart of CCS Plumbers & Gasfitters, Queensland. Up to it? Put a bucket under the trap. If the trap's plastic, unscrew slip nuts with hands; if it's metal or there's a plug on it, use a spanner. Hopefully your precious item will fall out.

### Unclog crap from a sink

Have a double sink? Plug second drain with wet rags. Fill blocked sink with enough water to cover a plunger's head. Pump plunger down and up, keeping it sealed to sink. After 10 plunges, jerk it up fast. If water doesn't rush out, plunge till your patience dies. No luck? Try removing the trap using the above instructions, then clean it with a wire coat hanger and hot, soapy water.\*

### Do (safe) electric work

Hire an electrician for anything beyond changing lightbulbs or checking the circuit box when a fuse blows. We hope you know how to do the former, but for a blown fuse, try this: check circuit breakers to see if an overload has flicked any off; if so: "If you can't turn it on, unplug (don't just turn off) every appliance in the home, then try to reset it again," says Joshua Nicholls from Platinum Electrical Contractors, Sydney. "If it resets, firstly turn on a radio – loud! Then plug in everything one by one until you hear the radio stop – this will show you which appliance caused the power to trip off." No good? Call a sparky.

### Fix gas issues (your home's)

If you smell strong gas, get out pronto and call a gasfitter from outside. And don't start a car if it's nearby. Just a faint smell? "If you find the leak was something simple like the cooktop being turned on by accident, keep the area ventilated and free from ignition sources like electrical appliances, torches or other lights," says gasfitter Mark Wigan, from EBM Industries, Brisbane.

### Change a split tile

It helps to have a matching tile to replace the cracked one, but if not, remove a few tiles and put in different ones for a new look. Don goggles like Safety Specs (\$21.37, Bunnings). Drill holes in each corner of wrecked tile. Lightly tap chisel against tile with hammer, then chisel it out. Remove crud from wall with a scraper. Apply tile adhesive to back of new tile, press in place, then sponge away excess adhesive. Leave overnight, then apply grout to joints with a damp sponge. Too hard? Dial a tiler. Hey, that rhymes.

### Fix a leaky tap

If you have one faucet with hot and cold combined, pay a plumber to replace the cartridge. For separate hot and cold handles, turn off the tap or valve (the main) at the water meter. In case that main tap has deteriorated\*\* and is letting water through, turn on other taps – eg, the garden one – to release residual water. Try to unscrew the dripping tap's handle – this is the trickiest part of the mission, so make sure you can do it before getting a new washer. Putting in the newie should be a breeze if you've managed to undo the tap.



**1 in 4**  
AUSSIES ATTEMPT HOME REPAIRS

SOURCE: 2009 ENERGY AUSTRALIA SURVEY

## TOOLS FOR HANDY WOMEN

These basics are available from hardware stores



### 1. SPANNER

Adjustable spanners (pictured) undo things with straight edges, like nuts. Pipe wrenches grab round things.



### 2. PLUNGER

You can use a regular plunger (pictured) for sinks and dunnies, but you can also get a toilet plunger with a flange, designed to fit in the toilet bowl.

### 3. POWER DRILL

While cordless ones are convenient, opt for a cheaper plug-in drill if you won't use it often.



### 4. CHISEL

Honour the rock legends and use a cold chisel on tiles and metal. Wood chisels are used for, um, wood.



### 5. SCRAPER

Make sure it's small enough to scrape out crap from the wall space where the cracked tile sat.

WORDS: ALICE ELLIS. PHOTOGRAPHY: PHOTOLIBRARY. \*YOU COULD TRY USING A DRAIN CLEANER, BUT HARSH CHEMICALS AREN'T GOOD FOR WATERWAYS AND SOME ARE POTENTIALLY DAMAGING TO PLUMBING. \*\*IF THE MAIN TAP IS DAMAGED, RING YOUR WATER COMPANY TO REPAIR IT.