

ASK AGGIE

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

Q We have very persistent ants in our downstairs rooms. Despite trying ant powder and filling the cracks we see them emerging from, they're with us in their thousands. Is there anything else we can do to get rid of them?

A Ants start appearing from April, and are at their most annoying in July and August, before tapering off by October. Sprinkling cayenne pepper or cedar oil along skirting boards is said to repel them, but why be kind? Get a kettle of boiling water, track down the source and pour! If you can't find the source, use Nippon Ant Bait Station (£2.31 per trap) or Raid Ant Bait (£3.09 for two traps) from hardware stores and selected

Asda stores. They contain an insecticide that the ants carry back to the nest which then kills the whole colony. Place them where you see them entering the house – they'll work for up to three months, depending on the brand and size of nest (you may need more than one trap). The problem may get worse before it improves as, in order to work, the traps are designed to attract ants.

If they are completely unmanageable, contact your council's pest-control department – many offer a fee-paying service. Otherwise, get in touch with the British Pest Control Association (0870 6092687; www.bpca.org.uk), and make sure you keep fruit and vegetables in the fridge.

Q My three best silk ties are stained with food and wine. Is there a home remedy?

A If they're not hideously expensive, you may get away with gentle handwashing in biological detergent (though they may lose some body). Don't rub or wring, otherwise you may damage the fabric or misshape the linings. Soak in a solution of two teaspoons of clear vinegar to three litres of water after the final rinse to preserve the colour. Leave for a few minutes, then roll up in a clean, dry towel and squeeze lightly to remove surplus water. Use a warm, dry iron while still damp (steam will only leave marks).

Alternatively, try Silk & Clean (around £4 for five sachets) from Tie Rack or Marks & Spencer. A quick wipe with the disposable pad should remove most marks. As with all stain removers, test on a hidden area first.

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

POLLY & SUZY
DO TRY THIS AT HOME

MARK HARRISON

Entertaining ideas for modern families

This week: Wedding worries

Please help! We have been invited to a wedding with our children aged 3 and 4. How on earth do we keep them quiet during the service?

This can be tricky sometimes, especially if the bride is very late, or the service goes on for ages. Make sure you take a good supply of crayons or pencils and a big pad of paper. Get them to draw a picture of the flowers in the church, the vicar, the lady in the big pink hat, but most importantly ask them to do their very best drawing of the bride and groom. The happy couple might be delighted to stick it in their scrapbook.

● A great silent game is Tattoos. Ask your child to close their eyes and promise not to peep. You, the tattoo artist, then draw an imaginary tattoo on the palm of their hand, with your finger. Start with easy shapes like a star, a square, a heart or a face. When the tattoo is complete, whoever has been sitting still with their eyes closed has to guess and whisper what you drew. Repeat the drawing as many times as necessary and swap roles if you want.

● In our experience, if you try too hard to contain squirming, wriggling children, they will start to squawk. Encourage your children to let off some steam by joining in the hymns and singing "La-la-la" loudly instead. If they start getting unbearably fidgety, a favourite toy or book produced from your bag might divert them for a while. Sit near the back and be prepared for one or other of you to take them outside and have a quick game of hide and seek in the churchyard. To tempt them back inside again, promise a tiny treat if they can sit quietly. And finally, don't dread it! All the other parents will understand what you are coping with.

If you're at your wits' end, e-mail Polly&Suzy@thetimes.co.uk

