

ASK THE EXPERTS

From interiors and gardening to DIY and eco design, our team answers your questions



INTERIOR DESIGN

SALLIE CHATER

Founder and director of her own interior design company, Interiors at 58, Sally believes in creating luxurious, elegant and original schemes at affordable prices



WINDOW DRESSING

Q I need curtains or shutters for my windows but don't know what to choose. Are bespoke products good value for money or are there other options? *Sara Lane, Perth*

If you're happy to make a long-term commitment, shutters are a good investment with timeless appeal

A Firstly, consider how long you're likely to stay in your home – if you're not looking to sell in the near future, then bespoke curtains or shutters are great value for money, as you'll enjoy them for years to come.

For curtains, select a neutral colour and pattern, should you decide to update your room. If you're concerned about budget or fancy a bolder style that you may want to change in future, consider 'dress curtains'. Like full curtains they frame the window, but don't close fully so use less fabric. They're more suited to non-street facing windows, however, because they don't offer the same amount of privacy.

Alternatively, choose sheer, unlined curtains – which are better value than heavier, lined fabrics – paired with blackout roller blinds. Or even better value would be unlined curtains with a simple pencil pleat heading. They're good if you don't want an overly formal look, as they use less fabric than pricier twin and triple pleat varieties.

Shutters can be expensive, especially on large windows, but they have a timeless appeal and, fitted correctly, should last for decades. Consider the width of the slat: smaller ones suit cottage-style windows while wider ones are better on larger Edwardian-style windows. If your budget is tight but you like shutters, pick half-height café-style designs. Or choose a wooden slat blind – with slats 50mm or wider and with tapes rather than strings – for a similar look at a fraction of the cost.

Other options include replacing clear glass with an etched glass panel or buying DIY window film (try purlfrost.com). It's a great choice for darker rooms as you won't lose as much light. You could also buy ready-made curtains online, which can be altered if necessary, and fitted by you.



Bringing green foliage into the home is one of the easiest ways to connect to nature



ECO DESIGN

OLIVER HEATH

The UK's leading expert in sustainable architecture and interior design, and a familiar face on TV

A NATURAL SPACE

Q Our kitchen and living room are in the basement and I struggle to create a connection with nature as it feels so enclosed. What can I do to bring the outdoors in? *Ellie Baines, Birmingham*

Ellie Baines, Birmingham

A Creating direct and indirect connections with nature in our homes has been shown to have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Direct connections can include real plants, water, sunlight and animals.

To start with, make the most of any natural light in your basement by placing plants that prefer low levels of light around the windows – ferns and ivy are great options. Even if there's no access to light, your foliage can still thrive. Several companies, including Ikea, have designed all-in-one growing systems for houseplants that include full-spectrum LED bulbs to support plant growth.

When direct forms of nature aren't an option, indirect forms such as natural textures, materials and shapes can be effective.

Incorporating timber with an obvious natural grain on work-surfaces, walls or floors, and real stone surfaces, plus wallpapers and fabrics with natural or textural prints, can all have an impact in enhancing nature within your home.

If your space is lacking in natural light or would simply benefit from more, sun tunnels can be used as a structural solution, pulling natural light down into dark rooms. Don't forget that mirrors also work well, bouncing light around a room and making it feel more open and airy.

One final trick is scented candles – the movement that a flickering flame provides is natural, unpredictable and calming, and many brands now offer natural scents, such as sandalwood and even earth, to help you feel more connected with the outdoors. ►

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