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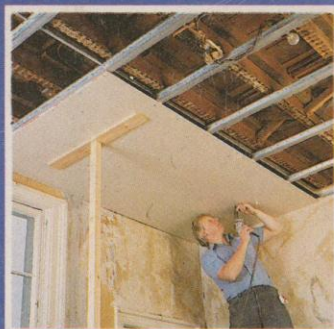
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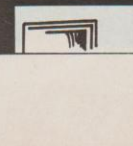
VENT-A-MATICS are available from:

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VENTILATION & CONDENSATION

Welcome to this brand new series by Tony Wilkins, well-known for his BBC radio Homeing-In, Tuesday Call, and the Gloria Hunniford Show broadcasts. In this series, Tony will be answering the questions most frequently asked on a wide range of subjects

Question Time

With so much emphasis in recent years on draughtproofing and insulation, we have tended to forget that good ventilation is vital for the well-being of any home – and those who live in it. Air trapped indoors can be germ-laden and smelly, making the whole atmosphere feel stuffy and unpleasant. There will also be a build-up of moisture vapour from cooking, bathing and washing, leading very often to severe condensation.

I have a window ventilator in my kitchen and two ventilation bricks in the bathroom – yet we still get condensation in both rooms. Is this normal? What can we do to reduce the condensation?

Unfortunately, the type of ventilation you are providing is very much governed by prevailing winds, and more often than not, cold air may be blowing into these rooms so no moist air is removed. The ventilators need replacing by extractor fans which force air out when needed.

How do we decide what size fan we need for our bathroom?

Very simply you need a unit which will give about 15 air changes an hour. Work out the cubic capacity of your bathroom (length x width x height) then relate this to the amount of air a fan will move. A kitchen should have about 12 air changes an hour, but a lounge only needs 4 to 6 air changes an hour.



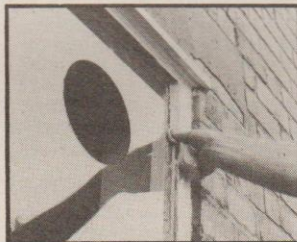
Xpelair's DX200T wall or ceiling-mounted fan has an adjustable timer which provides ventilation after the room has been vacated

We can't decide whether to fit a fan in a pane of glass or make a hole through an outside wall. The glass method certainly sounds the easiest. What do you advise?

Certainly there is less effort involved in fitting a window fan, but in most instances it does spoil the appearance of a window – and it precludes the use of net curtains. It is quite hard to cut a circle of glass in an existing pane – especially if the glass is not new. You would be advised to get a new piece cut.

By far the neatest way is to fit the fan in the wall, but this does of course involve making a suitable hole – and this can be quite tricky if the fan has to be sited one or two floors up.

WINDOW-MOUNTED FANS



Bedding in the new glass pane with the hole cut by a glazier



Screwing the Xpelair fan in the pane – you are cutting out some of the light but it's easier than installing a wall-mounted one

I am a bit apprehensive about making a hole in an exterior wall – never having done this before. Can you advise on the best way to do it?

It is not a difficult job, but be prepared for a lot of flying dust! And protect your eyes with safety specs and your hands with gardening gloves. Mark the position of the fan-liner hole on the interior wall plaster, then

use an extended masonry drill to drill holes at each corner right through the wall to the outside; these will mark the position of the hole exactly, both sides of the wall. Now use a sharp cold chisel and club hammer and tap a line around the wall plaster, then chip it away to expose the wall bricks or blocks.

With a cavity wall, cut away at the mortar until you can wiggle out loose bricks. Now block off the lower part of the cavity with old rags so that no debris falls inside. Carefully cut the remaining bricks until the required hole size is produced. Now move outside and repeat the process – except there is no plaster to deal with. You will usually find the exterior bricks tougher than the ones you encountered indoors. Remove the rags from the cavity before inserting the lining.

A solid wall is also best worked from both sides, going in about half-way from each.

WALL-MOUNTED FANS



1: Using a special long masonry bit to drill right through the wall – to mark the centre of circular fans or the four corners of square ones



2: Chopping out bricks from the inside with a cold chisel and heavy hammer

REMEMBER . . . IN CASES OF EXTREME CONDENSATION A DEHUMIDIFIER COULD BE INSTALLED.



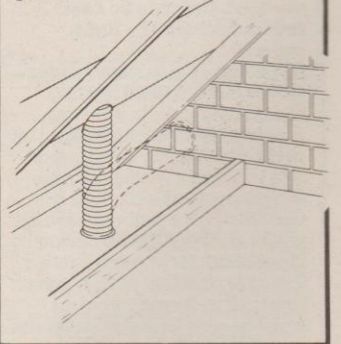
3: Chopping from the outside of the house to complete the hole



4: Cementing in the fan casing. Once the cement and surface plaster has dried and been redecorated, you should have a really neat finish

We have no outside wall suitable for a fan, and I don't want one in the window. Is it possible to vent upwards into the loft space?

No, it would be unwise to let the steamy air loose in the loft. You need a fan unit to which can be attached a flexible tube which terminates at a special little cowl unit poking out of the roof. Or take it out of a side wall or gable.



Our bedroom windows suffer from heavy condensation overnight in the winter – but we don't want to fit a fan. What is the answer?

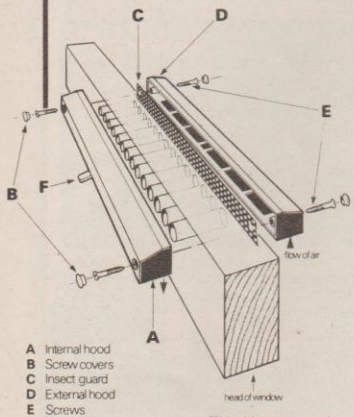
There is only one simple one: open a window! Very often even a small opening is sufficient to

VENTILATION & CONDENSATION CONTINUED

keep a room free from condensation, as air coming in will be dry enough to absorb the vapour produced by breathing. The same would not apply in a kitchen or bathroom where large quantities of vapour have to be dealt with.



This Sellotape ventilator is mounted in a door or window frame, providing ventilation without having to leave the window open. It costs around £7.25



This Huntervent is simple to install – just drill and screw

I have seen a fan unit with built-in delay so the fan will automatically come on when the bathroom light is switched on – then go off a few minutes after the room has been vacated. Can this be used independently of a light switch?

Yes it can – for in many homes where there is good lighting from daylight during the day, you don't want to put the light on every time the fan is required. You will find a wiring diagram supplied with the fan, and it is possible to fit a pull-cord switch which will operate the fan totally independently of room lighting. The only possible snag is that on a normal pull-cord unit you won't be able to see whether the fan is on or off! It may be running for a minute or two even in the off position.

Will a cooker hood deal with kitchen condensation? I don't really want to fit a hood and a fan.

The main benefit of a cooker hood is to deal with steam and fumes actually leaving the cooker. And unless the hood was sited at ceiling level it would not draw in air from any other part of the kitchen. Ideally, fit a hood with activated charcoal filter over the cooker. Then fit a fan in the wall, sited as high as possible, or try a cooker hood venting kit.

VENTING KITS

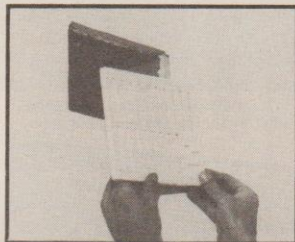
Oracstar make a venting kit which fits just about any make of tumble drier. To avoid terrible condensation with these machines you either have to open all the doors and windows or fit a venting kit like this. The duct can be run through a wall or window and you get everything you need in the box except the connector which has to be bought separately to match your machine. These kits cost between £11 and £13 and Oracstar make one for cooker hoods too

Since fitting our kitchen fan, the gas boiler smells very funny. There is a ventilation brick in the wall, but I blocked it off when the fan was fitted. Any advice?

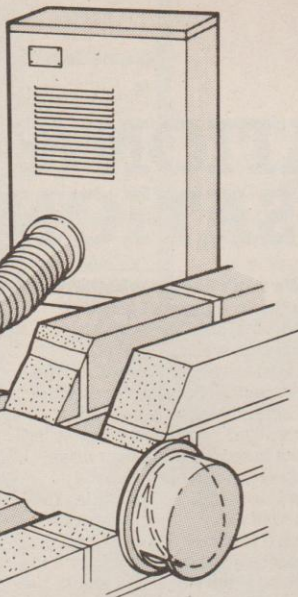
That ventilation brick is vital – especially when an extractor fan is in use. Otherwise, with all doors shut, the fan will pull air down the flue to replace that being extracted – and that could be fatal. If you are not happy with the wall ventilator, put one in the floor as close to the boiler as possible.

Since we draughtproofed our house, the fire in the lounge – which burns solid fuel and logs – burns very sluggishly. I guess it is starved of air. How can we cure this?

The ideal way is to fit a small ventilator either side of the hearth so the fire has its own air supply. It is amazing how much air will be pulled in. The benefit of vents close to a fire is that you get no draught across the room.



A blocked up fireplace must be ventilated



As we suffered from condensation on windows, I have had the place double-glazed throughout. While we don't get trouble on the glass, we now get damp patches on external walls – particularly behind wardrobes. Will cavity infill insulation solve this problem?

It will only move the problem from one place to another. Yes, you may keep external walls dry with cavity infill – but then damp may appear on cold floors, on clothing in wardrobes and, in extreme cases, on bedding. Insulation is to conserve heat. Ventilation is necessary to remove moisture-laden air from the house as it is produced.



This Bison Moisture Absorber really is great for small areas like a small bathroom, a caravan, cupboards and wardrobes; Bison do an absorber for 15m² and one for 75m² costing £5.50 and £13.50. They work for about three months and re-fills are available

I installed my own double glazing system, adding a secondary frame sealed with mastic. Now I find condensation forming between the panes despite a perfect seal. What is the cause?

Very simple, the problem is that you have in fact sealed damp air between the sheets of glass. A spot of winter sun may be all that is needed to deposit moisture droplets on the glass – where you can't reach it! Factory-sealed units have a dry gas inserted, containing no moisture. This is impossible to achieve at home, so units should always be designed to be openable – either by sliding or swinging. Then, if a small amount of vapour forms, you can open the unit and wipe it away with a cloth. Never seal the units.

I have heard of a way of ventilating double glazing by drilling holes in the outer frame. How is this done – and how does it work?

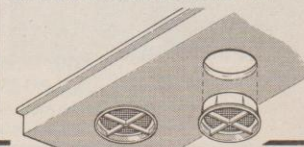
Yes, holes can be drilled, sloping down from the cavity to outside air. They should be no larger than 3mm. across. These allow a small quantity of cold, dry air into the cavity where it reduces the chances of steaming up. If the holes are made too large, there could be a circulation of air between panes, which would completely negate the effect of double glazing.

Will the introduction of silica gel crystals between panes of double glazing prevent condensation?

Not very effectively. True, the crystals will absorb moisture, but the heat of even winter sun will evaporate off the moisture back into the air. Ideally, remove the crystals after a few days; dry them in the oven and re-insert them.

I took advantage of the new grants available to insulate my loft, but now I find there is condensation on the roofing felt and the side of the metal water tank; this water drips over the insulation material and wets the roofing timbers. I'm very worried about this. What have I done?

You've done a good job. You have insulated the loft so efficiently that warm air cannot penetrate from the house, so the loft space is colder than before and condensation inevitably becomes a problem. What you should do, and it's very easy, is install loft vents in the eaves.



Condensation in the loft can be cured easily with push-fit soffit vents like these from Timloc Building Products

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STEAMY BATHROOM?



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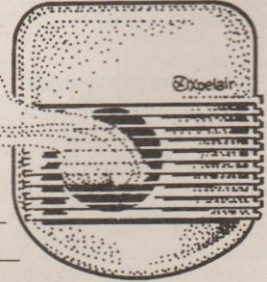
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