

Weather wise

From gutter cameras to wheelie bin stores, *Jayne Dowle* on how to storm-proof your house

Huge horse chestnut trees crashing through roofs, trampolines taking off and wheelie bins flying left, right and centre . . . it's been a hell of a year for extreme weather. With four named storms in just over a week, Dudley, Eunice, Franklin and now Gladys, and storm-related damage estimated by insurers to already top £350 million so far this year, the greatest clean-up of our bricks and mortar in a generation begins.

Damage from storms (42 per cent) and flooding (18 per cent) were two of the most common reasons for weather-related claims in 2020, according to Compare the Market, with an average claim of £3,500. It can also lead to lawsuits between neighbours. Jo Ord, a partner at the London law firm Farrer & Co, says: "Fences or boundary walls, chimneys, overhanging porches and conservatories on adjacent properties tend to be the repeat offenders when it comes to causing neighbours to fall out over damage."

Here's our guide on how to fix any damage and to futureproof your home and garden against the next blast of ferocious wind, rain and water, from wheelie bin stores to gutter cameras.



Roofs and guttering

Sales of bitumen roof sheets were up 98 per cent last week according to Gian-Carlo Grossi, the managing director at Roofing Megastore, followed by steel roof sheets (up 91 per cent). The cost of roofing materials is, you might say, going through the roof. "With the cost of structural steel and planed wood rising by 71 per cent throughout 2021, it's no surprise that construction materials cost about 25 per cent more at the start of 2022 than they did a year earlier," Grossi says.

Perform regular roof maintenance yourself to assess the state of your roof and

identify any weak points in need of repair. To help with this, you might like to invest in a SkyScraper Package with telescopic pole, from £600 at guttersuckerdirect.co.uk. You can add a camera and camera mount. For major roofing maintenance and repairs, you need a professional. Find one through the Confederation of Roofing Contractors (corc.co.uk).

High winds can rip guttering straight off, leading to cascades of rainwater down exterior walls, a cause of damp and mould indoors. Snow — and it's always possible in spring — can also damage guttering and drag it down. Excess debris caused by heavy



rain will block guttering and can cause cracks and tears, leading to leaks and blockages in downpipes. Fit Gutter Brushes, £19.99 for three, from coopersofstortford.co.uk, to repel moss and falling leaves. Meanwhile, tinkerandfix.co.uk does the Redecker Gutter Scoop, a handy gadget with a vintage-style adjustable angle handle designed to reach into every nook and cranny, for £24.95. For running repairs, professionals recommend Gorilla Waterproof Patch & Seal Tape, £18.99 (see uk.gorillaglu.com for stockists).

Tackle those trees

Put down the chainsaw – leave that to the professionals who will know the dangers of trees under tension and how they react when cut. The Arboricultural Association has a useful “find a professional” tool online (trees.org.uk).

Josephine Hedger, a tree-care specialist, says that some species of trees, such as willow, can have a large volume of the canopy removed in one go without affecting new growth next season. “Others, such as beech, do not tolerate large amounts removed or large diameter pruning cuts, so it’s recommended to plan pruning over a number of years to avoid stress to the tree.”

If you just need to tidy up broken branches to prevent further damage, Hedger recommends a powered pole



Before attempting work on any tree you should check it is not subject to a tree preservation order
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pruner such as the Husqvarna 120iTK4-P with battery and charger, £299 from husqvarna.com.

Before attempting work on any tree, even on your own land, you should check it is not subject to a tree preservation order (TPO). This may be on your deeds, or you can check with your local council, usually the planning department. See trees.org.uk for more information.

Flooding

Heavy rainwater causes chaos, damage to property and flooded gardens. A submersible pump, which you place directly in water, is now an essential piece of home kit if you live in a flood-prone area. It can be used pretty much anywhere, including basements/cellars and outdoors, where in more clement times it may serve double duty as a garden pond pump or to empty a hot tub. Draper Tools has a sturdy 250W Submersible Clean Water Pump, £55 (

drapertools.com).

Water massing against brickwork can cause erosive damage. If your property is badly afflicted by pooling water, you may need to call in a groundworks company to devise a new drainage system.

Bear in mind that floodwater is filthy. Jamie Woodhall, technical and innovations manager at Rentokil Specialist Hygiene, says: “Floodwater and sewage can be home to a plethora of microbes including some potentially serious infectious bacteria such as *E. coli*, cryptosporidium and salmonella, as well as several dangerous viruses.”

After cleaning up floodwater and dirt, affected areas must be thoroughly dried out to remove moisture which can enable micro-organisms to survive. Then a “broad spectrum” disinfectant, effective against bacteria, viruses and moulds, should be applied to all surfaces to help destroy any remaining germs.

Deal with drains

Underground drains and sewerage pipes are often forgotten, but in heavy weather can erupt on your property, causing flooding (see above). Your own blocked or ineffectual drains contribute to the nation’s often antiquated and creaking public drainage and sewerage system, coming under unprecedented pressure thanks to extreme weather conditions. Do your bit by investing in a drain rod set,



such as Bailey's 19mm Black Drain Rod Set, 9.14m, £28.99 from [screwfix.com](https://www.screwfix.com). You're only responsible for the drains on your own property, not the street outside — if there's a problem with the latter, contact your local water company as a matter of emergency.

Fences

Timber supplies were badly hit during the pandemic and as a result of Brexit and the Suez Canal delays. Shortages led to a price increase of 64 per cent in the year to July 2021, according to the Construction Leadership Council. Although supply chain issues have improved, delays in delivery and cost increases remain highly likely. Choose slatted not solid panels, so the wind can filter through easily and reduce strain from high winds. Jacksons Fencing recommends Venetian Hit & Miss, with smart horizontal slats, starting at £72 a panel ([jacksons-fencing.co.uk](https://www.jacksons-fencing.co.uk)); wooden posts, not concrete, because it's harder to fasten wooden panels to concrete securely; and deep post-holes filled with a specialist product such as B&Q's Blue Circle Extra Rapid Cement, £15.41 for 25kg ([diy.com](https://www.diy.com)). Also fence clips or brackets, such as B&Q's Blooma Steel Fence Brackets, £1.60 each ([diy.com](https://www.diy.com)), are better than nails, says Christopher Ray, the head of outdoor at B&Q, because they provide more stability: "They are screwed in



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on both sides of the fence and are simple and easy to remove."

Secure all openings

Check all doors and windows can close firmly. Upgrade or replace worn or wonky handles, hinges and catches. Give single-glazed windows an extra layer of protection from flying debris with Clear Shatterproof Window Film, £25.99 ([amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)). External wooden shutters (uPVC and steel/aluminium are also available) can add a strong design element and provide both added protection against harsh weather and security. Shutter Boutique's Rhino Security Plantation Shutters are priced according to size ([shutterboutique.co.uk](https://www.shutterboutique.co.uk)).

All outdoor electrical equipment must be weatherproof. The big question is, do you need a generator in case the power fails altogether? Toolstation says it's had a 674 per cent surge in searches for this particular piece of storm-

proofing kit during the recent storms. Opinions differ; generators are noisy and with petrol/diesel there's the eco-factor to consider, but if you live in an isolated spot, they can be essential. There are lots of models out there, but even Aldi is selling a basic Scheppach 1,76HP Inverter Generator, running on unleaded petrol, for £149.99 ([aldi.co.uk](https://www.aldi.co.uk)).

Look after your garden

The online DIY, home improvement and gardening retailer ManoMano says visits to its tarpaulin and wire, chains and ropes pages have increased by 80 per cent and 400 per cent respectively in February, as homeowners battle to batten down the hatches, securing garden plants, planters, pots and garden furniture.

Finally, if you buy nothing else, invest in secure wheelie bin storage. Not only does it look smart, keeping the back garden neat or adding kerb appeal, it will stop your bins in their tracks when the wind whips up. We like Wayfair's neat and affordable Elizabethtown Wooden Double Bin Store, £389.99 ([wayfair.co.uk](https://www.wayfair.co.uk)). The wait from the Wheelie Bin Store, which makes bespoke products such as the Quad Wheelie Bin Store Classic (smaller sizes are available), painted in your choice of Farrow & Ball shades, £880 ([wheeliebinstore.co.uk](https://www.wheeliebinstore.co.uk)), can be up to eight weeks. ■

