

# 30 Quick Fixes For Everyday Disasters

**INVADING ARMY:** Ants are having a feeding frenzy in your kitchen, and you don't want to use a toxic brew to defeat them.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "A 50/50 mix of peppermint oil and water will get rid of ants," says Amy Devers, co-host of the DIY Network's "DIY To The Rescue" show. "Fill a spray bottle, and spray wherever you see them coming out of hiding

**SPEAR FACTOR:** A weed-ridden asparagus patch has you about ready to give up on your favourite crop.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Add salt. "Asparagus is the only vegetable that can withstand salt," says Penny Griggs, an organic farmer in Vermont. "Spreading salt around your plants will kill the weeds but leave your asparagus unharmed."

**SPILLED JUICE:** The battery in your laptop is losing its charge much faster than expected.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Wireless operations are a little-known drain on laptop batteries. "If you can disable your wireless networking and still get your work done, do it," says Andy Hooper, owner of Intelligent Systems, an IT security company. "Some wireless cards can eat up half of your laptop's power."

**FROZEN OUT:** Cold weather has stiffened the mechanism of your garage door opener, causing it to lose power.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Most garage door openers made in the past 15 years have pressure adjustments for both raising and lowering. Check and adjust these settings seasonally to keep things running smoothly.

**SCREW LOOSE:** You're trying to replace a woodscrew, but the hole is stripped and the screw won't grab.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Insert two short lengths of thin, insulated wire in the hole before adding the screw. They'll allow the screw to bite.

**TRAPPED BELOW:** The water in the trap of your basement [floor](#) drain dried up-and now your cellar smells vaguely of nasty, nasty things.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Pour non-toxic plumbing antifreeze down the drain to fill the trap. You can use water in a pinch, but it evaporates faster than antifreeze, so you'll need to repeat the process more often.

**HOT WHEELS:** The temperature gauge on your car is headed for the danger zone, but you've got no time (or place) to park and cool your jets.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Turn the heater on full blast (opening the windows so you don't fry). The extra volume of the heater core and its hoses, as well as the

airflow of the heater fan blowing across the core, may dissipate enough heat to get you home--or to the garage--without a meltdown.

**ICE RAGE:** Your car doors freeze shut in cold weather.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "Spray the weather-stripping around the door frames with silicone," advises Al Toutant, a technician at Heath Auto Service in Greenwood, Maine, where they know a thing or two about cold weather. "It keeps moisture from collecting and freezing your doors shut in the winter, and it keeps it from drying out and cracking in the summer."

**POWER INTERRUPTION:** You need to remove your car's battery, but don't want to lose the settings on the car's radio, alarm, GPS and computer.

**THE QUICK FIX:** A 9-volt battery adapter can plug into your cigarette lighter to keep those chips powered up. Result: No more auto amnesia.

**DAMPNESS AT NOON:** Your clothes dryer seems to have lost its zip.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Clear the vent duct by removing the vent pipe and pulling out any accumulated debris from the pipe and duct. It's a 3-minute fix that can save you a \$75 visit from a technician.

**UNPLANNED POOL:** A big rain has flooded your basement. And, since it knocked out the power too, your usually reliable sump pump won't pump.

**THE QUICK FIX:** If you live on a slope, try making a siphon. First, fill a garden hose with water from the outside spigot. Seal one end with your thumb and have a friend seal the other. Place one end through the cellar window and into the standing water. Then, have your friend carry the other end as far downhill as possible (the outlet has to be below the intake). Release your thumbs and let gravity do the rest.

**SHAGGY LAWN:** You need to cut the grass before the in-laws show up but your mower won't start.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Before you give up and take it to the repair shop, try this. First, take out the spark plug and empty the gas. Then, get a new plug; add some fresh gas to the tank and, more often than not, the mower will start right up.

**CRACKED TEETH:** Someone--not you, surely--has broken a key off in a door lock, which is now jammed shut.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Use a grinding wheel to shape an old hacksaw blade into a harpoon-like point. Then, slip the point into the lock over one of the key nubs and use the hook to fish it out.

**BLURRED VISION:** The zoom shots from your fancy new digital camera are fuzzy.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Only use your *optical* zoom. Most digital cameras have both optical zoom, in which the lens moves (just like a zoom on a film camera), and digital zoom, which manipulates the image electronically. The digital zoom can compromise the quality of the image. If you want more magnification than

the optical zoom can handle, it's better to achieve it on a computer after the fact.

**RISING WATERS:** The toilet is about to overflow, and you know that your usual tactic of slamming the lid and crossing your fingers won't work.

**THE QUICK FIX:** As soon as the water level in the bowl starts rising, reach into the tank and prop up the fill valve (the ball or cylinder that floats on top of the water). That will stop the flow to the toilet, thwarting an overflow. The plunger, however, still waits.

**IMMOVABLE OBJECT:** A stubborn nut on an old lawnmower or pickup truck refuses to budge.

**THE QUICK FIX:** The standard tactic since the dawn of the acetylene torch has been to heat the nut until it glows red. When heat alone won't cut it, touch a candle to the glowing nut. The wax will melt and flow into the threads, acting as a lubricant.

**SNEAK LEAK:** You can't find the source of oil leaking from your engine.

**THE QUICK FIX:** First, spray the area with Easy Off kitchen cleaner. (It's cheaper than automotive cleaners.) Then, hose the area down, let it dry and spray on aerosol foot powder. The oil will stain a path in the powder, which you can follow back to its source.

*Editor's Note: We've already received mail on this one. Yes, Easy Off can corrode aluminium, but the damage isn't instantaneous. Make sure to rinse it off with a hose both promptly and thoroughly*

**SUN-DRIED TOMATOES:** You need a way to water sensitive [tomato plants](#) during your summer vacation, without asking your neighbour to take care of them (again).

**THE QUICK FIX:** Collect some litre-size plastic soda bottles and punch a few small holes in each one. Then, bury a bottle up to its neck next to each of the plants. Before you leave, simply fill the bottles; they'll slowly release the water over the next four or five days and keep your plants from wilting.

**STRUCTURAL COLLAPSE:** A broken tent pole is threatening to ruin your annual family camping trip.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "As long as you don't need it to hold up to serious weather, you can splint a tent pole with a branch," says Michael Hodgson, author of *Camping For Dummies*. (Use medical tape, dental floss--or, yes, duct tape.) "Heck, you can even pitch a tent entirely with branches if you need to."

**POLTERGEIST DOOR:** Every house has one, a door that slowly drifts shut every time you try to leave it open.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Rather than resetting the hinges or propping it open with a potted plant, remove one of the hinge pins, lay it over a nail atop a hard

surface, and strike it lightly with a hammer until the hinge pin has a slight bend. Tap the pin back in place. The increased friction will keep the door where you want it.

**TRASHED SINK:** The kitchen garbage disposal is frozen.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "Ninety-five percent of garbage disposals have a reset button on the motor," says Chris Hall, a former appliance repairman and founder of Repairclinic.com. "No other appliance has this, so people assume they need to call a technician. I've answered literally dozens of calls that just needed someone to hit the reset."

**BLANK SLATE:** You've lost the stylus to your PDA.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Use a toothpick. It works as a replacement--and does double duty after dinner.

**CHILLY DEPTHS:** There's a puddle of water under your refrigerator, and it's growing.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "I see this all the time," says Jeff McKinney, owner of JEM Plumbing and a member of ServiceMagic.com. "Usually, it's because the icemaker line has sprung a leak. People don't realize that there's a shutoff valve. Typically, it's under the sink. If not, look in the basement, beneath the fridge."

**CRACK HABIT:** You've always used Spackle to patch cracks in plaster walls, just like your father did. But the pesky fissures keep opening up.

**THE QUICK FIX:** "Use a clear latex acrylic caulk, rather than traditional patching compounds," says John Stauffer, technical director at the Paint Quality Institute. "The caulk has some flexibility, so it won't open up if your house moves a bit."

**DRIP SERVICE:** A toilet tank is dripping and you can't tell if the water is coming from harmless seasonal sweating or a bad seal.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Dump some food colouring into the tank and see if the colour reaches the floor. If it does, check the tank for cracks and the piping for loose connections.

**SPARELESS MISTAKE:** You've got a flat tire on your mountain bike, and you don't have a spare inner tube.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Create a makeshift inner tube out of leaves and grass. "It sounds absurd, but it really works," says Scott Kaier, a mechanic at Onion River Sports in Montpelier, Vt. "Leave one side of the tire bead hooked on the rim, and cram the opening with as much soft stuff as you can find. Install the other bead, and away you go." At least it will get you home.

**CHIMNEY SEEP:** No matter what you do, the paint on your masonry chimney keeps peeling.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Install a galvanized (good), stainless (better) or copper (best) rain cap. These start at about \$30 and are available in most home repair and building supply outlets. "Peeling chimney paint is almost always caused by water working its way from the inside, out," explains John Stauffer,

technical director at the Paint Quality Institute. "A rain cap will keep the bulk of the water out of the flue."

**A TWO-WEEKEND PAINT JOB:** You want to put away your paint-laden rollers and brushes without cleaning them.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Wrap the painting utensils tightly in a plastic bag and stick them in the freezer. Once thawed, they'll be ready to use. Caveat: Paint is for painting, not eating. Be sure to seal the bag tightly to eliminate any chance of food contamination.

**FLUID LOSS:** Your radiator is leaking, you're in the middle of nowhere, and there's no repair shop in sight.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Dump in a small container of ground black pepper. The pepper won't dissolve, but instead will remain in suspension. This allows it to temporarily plug minor leaks, buying you enough time to get to the shop.

**CROSSED SIGNALS:** You're constantly getting kicked off the wireless link on your home computer network.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Other devices are probably interfering. If you have a 2.4-GHz cordless phone, switch to a 900-MHz, or a newer 5.8-GHz, model. These phones operate on different frequencies than your wireless router. (Some 2.4-GHz phones allow you to change frequencies--check your owner's manual.)  
Microwave ovens also disrupt your wireless signal.