

Giving You the Dirt

By SEAN JAMES, N.P.D.,
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Brightening the Winter

It's dreary! You can't deny it but don't despair! There's a way around the gloom. Let's look at indoors and out.

Indoors, I try to keep fresh cut flowers or forced bulbs on an end table. Whether or not you're looking for fragrance is up to you. Bright flowers and foliage can also be had from potted plants - from tropical plants and from plants brought in from outside. Impatiens and Coleus are just two annuals which can be dug up and brought inside.

To get plants to flower, it's necessary to reserve some window space. Few plants will bloom without bright light. They like to be right against the window. Light is relative to us but not to plants. The coffee table in the middle of the room seems bright compared to the dark corner. That's just not good enough for plants. Remember, there's just not much sunlight in a Canadian winter. They need all the light they can get. If you must punish plants by putting them in a corner, at least rotate them with other plants into the window so no one plant suffers too much.

Some good house plants for foliage colour include Iresine, with the unfortunate common name of 'Beef Plant', Rex Begonias, some yellow leafed Chinese Evergreens, Gold Dust Plant, Dieffenbachia, Ti Plant, and the old standby Golden Pothos, which most folk wrongly know as a Philodendron. A good flowering shrub, if you have the light is the Camellia.

For a dark corner an excellent but expensive solution is a Cast Iron Plant. It's the only plant I can think of which will put up with practically any abuse. As with most plants, it's important to neither under nor over water.

An added benefit of house plants is humidification. While it may not

become a rainforest, it will certainly help take dryness out of the air. Plants also remove pollutants and carcinogens from the air. Some such as Spiderplants and Dieffenbachia are particularly effective removing as much as eighty percent of chemicals such as formaldehyde and chloride from the air in one day. These chemicals are released by textiles, from smoke and from the products we use in our homes.

There are many benefits to having colour indoors in the winter. I think just putting up with all this snow and cold should entitle us to a few nice things. What were our ancestors thinking? No one told them about the Caribbean?

For the outside, within site of your most used windows, plant shrubs such as Highbush Cranberry, which holds red berries until spring but needs lots of space - eight feet. The P.J.M. Rhododendron has rich mahogany winter leaf colour but likes dappled shade. A fantastic small tree is Washington Hawthorn, (Crataegus phaenopyrum), which has wonderful gnarled form, many red berries all winter, white spring flowers and stunning fall color. If you like crabapples, look for a cultivar which holds its berries through the winter and has good disease resistance.

Although not bright, an exceptional plant for winter interest is the Needle Juniper, Juniperus rigida. Its winter form is my favourite, with delicate weeping branchlets and golden-brown winter colour. Unfortunately, it's very hard to find. I usually travel to Vineland Nurseries in the Niagara Peninsula, (905-562-4836).

We won't get into perennials for winter interest this time or, sadly, winter planters. Suffice it to say that just because it's Canada doesn't mean it needs to be dull.

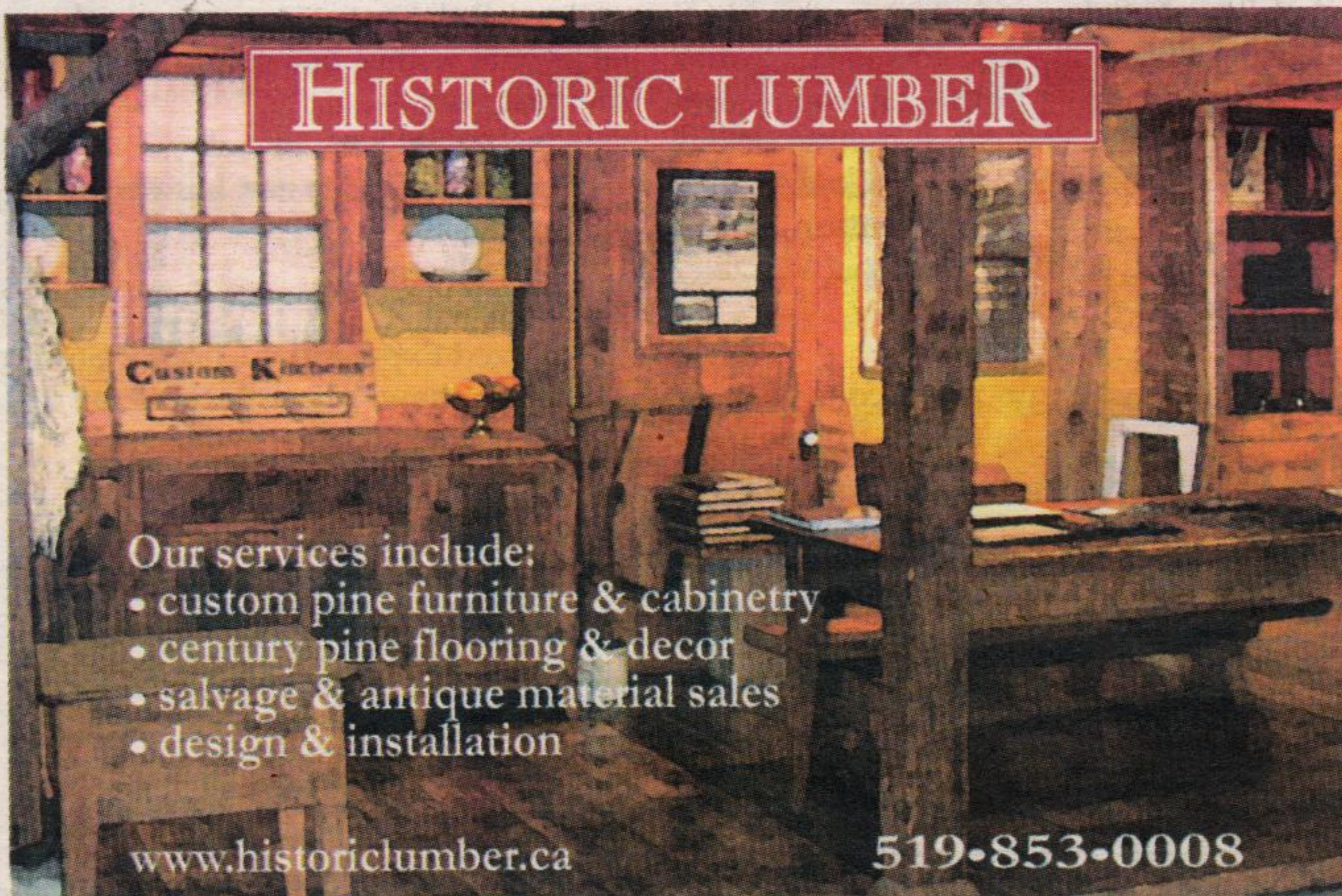
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Contractor's Corner

WITH RICK THOMAS



As promised in our December issue of Board & Batten, we will attempt to answer your questions pertaining to home improvement and repair. Simply email your query and we will publish your question and answer in the next B& B edition.

Paul K asks:

I have recently found, after moving into a 5- year-old home, a problem with flies, especially in the spring and fall months.

I traced the problem to an area under the whirlpool bath, which covers a large area in the corner of the bathroom. It has attached a heating style grill for access to the motor etc. (This is where the flies are gaining entry... hundreds of flies.)

I have checked the exterior walls for cracks/small holes on the outside walls of the bathroom and there are none!

My question is: Are the flies able to come down through the bathroom wall from between the attic joists? (I know the builders did not do the greatest job lining in the insulation under the bath and then sealing with plastic because I can see gaps in the insulation to the outside wall).

Am I able to fill the joist in the attic where I suspect they are coming in with caulking or something similar?

Thanking you in advance for your help
(ps I cannot get underneath the bath to double check because a large area has been tiled.)

Dear Paul K

I suspect that a mouse (or more than one) has met its demise, after finding its way to the whirlpool. The decomposition has left you with a perfect breeding ground for flies.

Try vacuuming the area under the whirlpool, and removing any matter (through the grill). Place mouse seed for any new intruders. Fill any gaps in the attic with low expansion foam insulation. These steps should solve your problem.

Rick's Contractor's Corner can be reached at askacontractor@yahoo.ca, and the next Board & Batten issue will run February 4th, 2005.

