



This month, *Easy Living's* decorating editor, Sophie Martell, answers your home queries

Q Which house plants will brighten up my home in autumn and winter, and not require much care?

A Flowering plants are the best way to introduce colour to your home. Potted gerbera and chrysanthemums are simple to look after, and *Clivia miniata*, jasmine, and peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*, below) all flower in winter.



Flowering bulbs such as amaryllis and narcissi are fantastic winter bloomers. The moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) adds instant glamour, comes in a range of colours and flowers for up to three months.

Many plants tolerate periods of neglect, including *Aspidistra*, *Billbergia*, *Chlorophytum*, *Fatsia*, mother-in-law's tongue and dragon tree.

For the lazy, fake flowers are no longer something to fear. Bloom (bloom.uk.com) has a stylish collection of silk flowers in beautiful pots and vases which don't look far off the real thing.

Q My family regularly comes to stay, but I live in a small flat. There isn't space for a sofa bed – is there anywhere I can buy a spare single bed which can easily be stored out of sight?

A There are plenty of nifty single beds which fold away easily. One of our favourites is the bed in a cupboard, £259, The Telegraph Shop (shop.telegraph.co.uk), which is perfect to go in a study or spare bedroom and has a handy top to store books and other bits and bobs. Both Marks & Spencer and The Cotswold Company sell a bed in an ottoman – a perfect solution for small sitting rooms where there isn't much space for a sofa bed, doubling up as a handy footstool at other times.

If you need extra beds for children, roll-up beds from Letterbox easily unroll into a comfortable mattress; measuring 200x70cm, they can also be used for larger visitors, at a push. The inflatable single bed from Aerobed, £140, John Lewis (johnlewis.com), is invaluable – and surprisingly comfortable. You could even stash it in the boot of a car.



Roll-up bed, £89.99, Letterbox. Call 0870 600 7878; letterbox.co.uk. Ottoman bed, £349, The Cotswold Company. Call 0870 550 2233; cotswoldco.com



Q I've just bought a cottage with small rooms and low ceilings. Can I make the rooms appear bigger?

A Use the lighter shades of your chosen paint for the walls and avoid dark, strong colours. Cooler colours recede and help to open up a room – cool colours have a blue or green base, such as pure white, blue whites, blue purples and blue greens. Paint woodwork the same shade – or one slightly darker – than the walls. Always paint the ceiling white and consider doing the same to any beams, to make the ceiling feel less oppressive.

Maximise light by using big mirrors to reflect daylight from nearby windows into

the room. Also, opt for blinds and shutters instead of bulky curtains. If you're prepared to throw some money at the problem, consider removing doors between adjoining rooms, or ask a builder to knock down a wall.

Go for simple, classic furniture, and use the same flooring throughout the house, for a streamlined effect. Utilise all space up to the ceiling – think tall bookcases, wall shelves and the like. These will emphasise the height of the room as well as providing useful extra storage.



From left: Elephant II, Elephant III, Salt Lake II, Salt Lake III, Water Green II, Water Green III. All chalky emulsion, £25.75 per 2.5l, Francesca's Paints. Call 020 7228 7694; francescaspaint.com