

# Countryside

FEBRUARY 2016 

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February 2016 £3.60





## Turning over a new leaf

Spring. The new growing season. It's also your last-ditch opportunity to tidy up the leftover leaves and debris caused by a winter of wind and rain of epic proportions. **Malcolm Bates** has what you need for the job

**W**HO WAS THE bright spark at the Met Office who came up with the idea of naming storms? I'm guessing 'the spark' in question doesn't have a garden. Because were that the case, I'm pretty sure the names chosen would better reflect the chaos and effort involved in clearing up after them.

So if you feel like you've been under attack from 'Storm Adolf', 'Atilla' or 'Vlad-the-Impaler' in recent months, the following selection of kit might come in useful in helping to get your garden and other outdoor areas clean and tidy - so you can enjoy the spring in all its glory.

If left, rotting clumps of dead leaves can block drains and kill off your grass - although do take care when clearing them over the next few weeks in case a hibernating hedgehog has made its home in a sheltered corner.

Mud from countless wellie-wearing missions over winter will soon turn to dust in dry weather. So that has to go, too. Besides, if not swept clean, your yard could soon be sprouting a crop of enthusiastic weeds to add to your troubles!

But surely the biggest threat to domestic peace and harmony - and, if not sorted out sooner rather than

later, your bank balance, too - is blocked gutters. Where does all that gunge come from? It's a mystery.

The regular cleaning-out of gutters is essential if you're going to avoid rotting soffits and the drips from full gutters keeping you awake at night. The problem? The traditional method - shinning up a ladder with a bucket and trowel - is an accident waiting to happen.

So a clever wet-dry suction unit that enables you to do the job from ground level in complete safety must be worth a look. Or how about a leaf-litter collector and a yard broom that utilise the same pedestrian-controlled power unit? Or a clever bolt-on engine/suction unit that turns a humble domestic wheeled bin into a mobile, outdoor vacuum collector? Or a rotary lawn brush towed by a ride-on mower? Just the thing to give your lawn a good groom.

Yes, of course you could continue to use 'the manual method' for all your spring cleaning tasks. But having the right machine to do the job should enable you to do things more quickly, to a higher standard, in greater safety.

My place has been getting in a right old state over the past few months, so let's crack-out the kit and get cleaning...

# The sky's the limit

## 'SKYVAC' COMMERCIAL GUTTER CLEANING SYSTEM

● SkyVac 'Commercial' Gutter Cleaning System. Electric 240volt (or 110v) wet/dry vacuum unit with two industrial motors giving 150ins of water lift. Lightweight, carbon-fibre suction poles to give up to 40ft reach - a four-storey building. ● Price as tested - with remote CCTV camera to give 'live' ground level viewing, telescopic inspection pole and storage bags - £1,960. ● Available from Spin-a-Clean of Towcester, Northants. Call 01327 831604 for more product information and demonstration bookings. Other cleaning machines available.

This is the machine I've been waiting for. Cleaning out gutters has to be one of the most awkward, time-consuming - and potentially dangerous - jobs going.

Wrestling with a trowel, a bucket and a load of wet glop while dangling from a ladder, doesn't qualify under 'sense of adventure' in my book. It's just dangerous. Reach just a little too far sideways to get that last bit and... Well, in my case, there could so easily be a Tom-and-Jerry-style Malcolm-shaped hole through my conservatory roof.

So an industrial-grade vacuum machine that enables you to do the job in complete safety from ground level? That has to be worth a look. I know what you're thinking - if you're at ground level, how can you see if the gutter has been cleared properly?

The answer? The rigid-but-lightweight SkyVac poles - to which one of several optional nozzles can be attached to suit any gutter - come with a remote CCTV camera, to give you a 'live' nozzle's-eye-view on a monitor screen, which is clipped to the pole at ground level.

If that sounds highly technical and fraught with mistakes, I can assure you, it's not.

In fact - and I don't want to sound too 'nerdy' about this - it actually makes the job of cleaning out gutters into a fun job. True, you do need to exercise some care when lifting the pole, but as you're supposed to hold it vertically wherever possible, it's not as difficult as expected.

In fact, once I'd done the main house, I had a go at the barns and after a break for a coffee (and to check whether the vacuum machine was full - it wasn't), still had enough energy to tackle the cottages next door!

If there's a downside, it's that the SkyVac needs access to a 240-volt domestic socket, or a 110-volt transformer. A lithium-ion battery-powered unit would be more versatile, but as a 'professional' wet/dry machine, there should be no safety concerns about 'water' and electric cables, as the collected debris is sealed into the container and the on-off switches are weatherproof.



**HANDY:** The SkyVac allows gutters to be cleaned from ground level



**VERSATILE:** Various nozzles are included for all applications

### SEEING IS BELIEVING:

The condition of the gutter is picked up by remote camera and shown on screen

### VERDICT

This is a brilliant bit of kit. It didn't get blocked once. Aside from cleaning all the gutters in your village (seriously, you'll want to!), you can also use it as a conventional vacuum cleaner, indoors and out. It comes with 20ft/540cm of 2-inch/50mm diameter flexible hose and at 21.5 inches/540mm wide, can be wheeled through most doorways. The extension poles come in a stout bag (so you won't lose them) and the remote CCTV camera and screen also get their own bag when not in use.

True, it's not cheap - but how much is your personal health and safety worth? As a bonus, the CCTV camera, screen and inspection pole can also be used to check the condition of your roof and other hard-to-reach structures. Spin-a-Clean has just announced a hire package at £90-plus-VAT/plus delivery, per day. That's well worth considering.

