

help wanted

how bad is it...

...to use fertilizer that's a year old?

A: You don't need to toss that bottle or bag you bought last spring. Odds are, if it's less than five years old, it's still good. Always shake the liquid well before using it, or if you have granular or powdered fertilizer, check that it hasn't come in contact with moisture, which can cause it to clump, making it impossible to apply the suggested amount. If it's older than five years, the fertilizer shouldn't harm your lawn, but it could be less effective, says Jeff Gillman, coauthor of *Decoding Gardening Advice*. "You may not get the same good results that you did when you first used it."

BOTTOM LINE:
not bad at all!



...to cover a scratch on wood furniture with a permanent marker?

A: It depends where the scratch is and how good you want the repair to look. Ideally, anything that's at tabletop level or is easily visible should be refinished by a pro, who will blend the fix with the original color. But if the nick is at the bottom of a table leg or on an out-of-the-way spot, a marker could do the trick, says Donna Martinetti, co-owner of a Furniture Medic franchise in Hillburn, NY. "Fixes are less obvious on wood with a matte finish and lots of different shades in the grain, so they're generally the best candidates for a marker cover-up," Martinetti says. Remember that your quick fix is permanent, so if it looks wrong, you'll have to sand down the area and start again with another color. Test the marker in a discreet spot first to make sure it's a match.

BOTTOM LINE:
not so bad!

...to use hand sanitizer instead of washing your hands?

A: If you're not near a sink, go ahead. Hand sanitizer is a perfectly effective way to kill germs. Just make sure you use a product that contains at least 60% alcohol. But if a sink is handy—or you've just used the bathroom or are about to prepare food—turn on the faucet! "Hand gels are fine for killing certain kinds of germs, but they don't work for all. Hand-washing for at least 20 seconds is a better way to go," says Anna Bowen, M.D., a hand-washing expert for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "When it comes down to it, there's no true replacement for soap and water."

BOTTOM LINE:
sorta bad!



...to leave your house while an appliance is on?

A: Although it's rare, faulty appliances can cause house fires—about 9,600 each year—to say nothing of small issues (a leaky washing machine hose) that could turn major (a flooded laundry room) if left unchecked for hours. "It's never a good idea to leave your house while an appliance is running, with obvious exceptions like your fridge," says Jill Notini, spokesperson for the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers. Be extra careful with your oven—unattended cooking is the main cause of kitchen fires. If you have to leave, turn the oven off until you get back.

BOTTOM LINE:
really bad!

