

A Tenants Guide to Managing Damp in Older Properties

It is almost inevitable that you will find damp in an old house. The worst enemy of old houses is we humans. It's generally what we do to them, or fail to understand about them, that causes most of the problems.

The Causes and Prevention of Damp

Rising Damp

Rising damp is usually worse at the bottom of a wall than the top. It rarely rises more than one meter in height. Apart from blocked air bricks, the most common cause is when earth from the garden butts up directly on to the house wall, trapping moisture. It can be remedied by simply digging away all the soil to see if it makes a difference.

Penetrating Damp

Penetrating damp forms when water gets in from the outside. Check gutters and downpipes to make sure they are unobstructed. Check the rendering to see if it's cracked. Also check underneath window sills as there should be a drip groove to shed rainwater before it gets to the house wall. If this is blocked with moss, dirt or cement, clear it thoroughly.

Condensation

Unlike the other types of damp, condensation is largely caused by the inhabitants of the property, rather than problems with the actual building. Condensation forms when warm air trapped inside the house meets cold walls and mould quickly spreads. The water comes from our breathing, bathing, cooking and other domestic activities, even if you cannot see it. To remove mould caused by condensation, scrub well with a mix of hot water and bleach. Leave it to work for several minutes and then clean off thoroughly.

As a Tenant, how can I deal with Condensation?

Firstly, you need to understand how condensation forms. All air contains water vapour. The quantity contained depends on the temperature of the air. Hot air is able to carry much more moisture than cold air, so as the air temperature increases it is able to hold a greater volume of water.

At any temperature, when the air becomes saturated, it will deposit beads of water (condensation) on to any surface that is cold enough. The temperature of the surface at which this moisture will form is called the 'dew point'. For example, take a glass bottle out of the fridge and see what happens.

If this happens near the ground, to a small layer of air, dew or frost will form. If a larger amount of air is involved, mist or fog will form. If this happens to air that is rising in the atmosphere and expanding, clouds will form.....If this happens at home it is called condensation.

As soon as warm air, containing vapour, hits a cooler surface, it will condense. This is most obvious on windows and wall tiles but is happening on the walls and ceilings a lot of the time. It is common to think that if we insulate ourselves and keep the house warm, condensation will not happen but this is not correct. The air temperature will rise until it finds a cooler surface, unless we let that air out and some cooler air in.

As a Tenant, how can I manage or prevent condensation?

A change of air is recommended in all rooms in your home, at the very least, once a day.

Further tips to consider

1. Keep furniture a little further away from the walls so the air has a free flow around the room.
2. Do not fill cupboards to bursting point, again, allow the air to flow.
3. Make sure the insulation in the loft is not blocking the ventilation provided by the gap between the fascia boards and the house wall, or in a lot of cases these days, purpose made vents.
4. Get the heating thermostatically controlled wherever possible.
5. Ventilate tumble driers externally.
6. Open your windows. At the very least, make sure you keep open the trickle vents.
7. Do not use radiators to dry clothes
8. Do not use portable gas heaters in your home.