



HOME IMPROVEMENT

Horror Stories

Home sweet home. A dream come true for many, there's nothing like owning your own little piece of heaven on earth. A place where you can put your feet up, let your hair down, and even run around in the buff if you feel like it.

But it doesn't take long to realize that home ownership is not all sweetness and light. It's a big responsibility and a whole heckuva lot of maintenance—more for some than others, as your stories illustrate. From a hungry Ditch Witch to an underwear-clad, glue-covered husband, your stories made us laugh, sympathize and learn important lessons.

Thanks to everyone who sent in a story. The judges' selections are on these pages and you can see more on our Web site: www.carolinacountry.com.

In March we'll publish your gardening secrets (deadline was January 15). For the remaining themes and rules in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series, see page 24.

—Tara Verna, Associate Editor

INDOOR SNOWSTORM

Years ago, my husband and I combined families and decided to expand my house. As the remodeling progressed, an out-of-town trip seemed the perfect time for a subcontractor to spray the perlite texture to match the existing ceilings.

After arriving home, we noted the beautiful ceilings. However, everything else—the furniture, boxes and rolled carpets—looked as if we'd had an inch of snow. Despite their assurances that nothing would be damaged, the workmen, left alone by their boss, had covered none of our possessions. Though we cleaned for days, months later, as I hung pictures in our newly remodeled living room, I found white particles behind the glass of our wedding photos.

*Patricia Raible
Monroe
Union Power Cooperative*

LIVING ROOM ROCKSLIDE

My husband and I live in an 1840s farmhouse. We decided to have the chimney lined by a chimney sweep who would pour a mixture of concrete and sand down the chimney where it would settle around the flue. The work was started on a Saturday afternoon. About 4 p.m., the chimney sweep told me that he was almost finished. The mixture would now harden.

I was preparing supper when I heard what sounded like a loud rockslide. I raced into the living room and saw the mixture had collapsed over my den carpet. I ran outside to tell the chimney sweep who then rushed inside and saw the horrific mess. The chimney sweep claimed it was the first time such a thing had happened. He said, "The best thing to do is to let the mixture harden. I will come back on Monday, vacuum it up, and the carpet will be as good as new."

The mixture hardened. The chimney sweep vacuumed it up and then poured another liner that worked. It was the last liner he ever poured.

*Lillian Harden
North Windsor
Roanoke Electric Cooperative*

HOW NOT TO RUN A DITCH WITCH

A good friend of mine asked me to help him dig a trench in his yard so that he could run an electric line from his house to his barn. So early one morning, we rented a large Ditch Witch trencher.

When we got to his house, he went inside to change clothes and I decided to start the trencher and let it warm up. Unbeknownst to me, the trencher was in drive mode and began slowly creeping forward with its tines in motion. In a panic, I couldn't find the off switch, and within seconds, it had ripped two gaping holes in the back door of his van. Fortunately, when it began pulling against the hold-down chains, it broke the drive shear pin and quit moving. Otherwise, I guess it would have completely devoured his van.

After we took it back to the rental company and had the shear pin replaced, we began again. This time we hit the branch city water line serving his house. After spending an hour trying to get the five-sided nut loose on the water meter cover, we were able to get the water turned off and continue trenching. Next, we dug up the electric line going to his yard light.

Our final act of destruction involved cutting through the city gas line that went

to his house. As luck would have it, the gas company's regular workers were on strike so an emergency crew of supervisory personnel was dispatched to make the repair. It was quite a sight seeing those guys in their white shirts and dress pants crawling around in the hole trying to shut off the flow of gas. Needless to say, they weren't very happy.

This was probably the worst day of my life. I've never had so many things go wrong in one day. Two things I learned: 1) Know how to operate your equipment before starting a job, and 2) Always call a locator service before you dig.

*Dennis Fruits
Dallas
Rutherford EMC*

DREAM SWING BITES THE DUST

At last! We were ready for the finishing touch on our brand-new log cabin, "Dream Spirit," in the North Carolina mountains: a cozy porch swing. As we assembled drill, eyebolts, chain and ladder to hang the swing, we fantasized about lazy afternoons gently swaying in a cloud of pillows. We'd read, doze, dream and watch for deer, wild turkeys, bobcats and maybe even black bears.



Marcia Hickman (left) and Reene Ann Slack test out the dream swing.

Our faithful neighbors, Reene Ann and Pat, were on hand to help. Soon the swing dangled proudly from the porch rafters and it was time to try it out. Marcia and Reene seated themselves ceremoniously and shoved off. Blam! Reene's side of the swing crashed to the porch floor, simultaneously ripping a board off of the ceiling. I ran for the camera. The bolts, we later discovered, had not been centered properly in the ceiling's two-by-fours. Luckily, Reene has a sense of humor as well as a little padding and was not hurt.

We'll all be telling the tale and showing the photo for years to come.

*Sue Spirit
Zionville
Blue Ridge Electric*

PRESSURE WASHERS

My dad usually did all the repair work or painting at our house. Several years ago, we kids decided to paint the house for him since he was getting up in years and didn't need to be on a ladder. The old paint was flaking and needed to be scraped off. My brother-in-law Gale Wilson and I agreed that scraping would be too much work and we should use a pressure washer to knock the old paint off.

One afternoon, Gale brought a pressure washer over to start the job. The only problem was that neither of us knew how to work it. We experimented with different nozzles from the smallest, which actually cut down into the wood, to the largest, which didn't do much at all, until we found the right one. After adjusting the pressure and having everything just perfect, we went all over the house. The old paint came off with ease. The pressure washer made easy work out of a potentially hard job.

Not until the next day, after the house had dried, did we discover that not only had the paint been knocked loose from the house, but some of the wood had as well. This resulted in a house of splinters. My sisters tried to smooth out a section by sanding, but it didn't work. Daddy was so discouraged. He told my mother, "Mama, those boys have ruined my house."

After Gale and I explained that this would be the perfect opportunity to put vinyl siding on the house, Daddy agreed. When the siding job was done, Daddy was very happy and pleased because the 50-year-old house looked new.

My whole family still laughs about this ordeal.

*Tony H. Fox
Statesville
EnergyUnited*

THE CHEAPEST HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECT EVER?

My wife and I had been married for a little over a year when I had the worst idea of my life. I decided to remove the old storm windows (eyesores) from our home. I then noticed that almost every

window had at least one cracked pane. After viewing a TV show about glass cutting, the idea hit me. I would replace all of the 21 cracked panes using the glass from the 16 storm windows that we would no longer use.

It was a hot morning in July when I went to Lowe's for a glasscutter. The salesperson assured me that it was quite simple: just measure (twice), mark the cut, score the glass, tap and voila! This was going to be the cheapest home improvement project ever, because the replacement glass was free, and I only spent \$5 for the cutter.

With hammer in hand, I started to break out the cracked panes. I measured, marked and scored the glass, tapped as instructed, and the storm window shattered. The same thing happened with the second, third and the fourth windows. After breaking 10 storm windows without cutting the FIRST replacement pane, I began to panic.

I called every glazier listed in the phone book but none were open. Then the sky blackened and we had one of the worst thunderstorms of the summer. I was running around the house with cling-wrap and tape, trying to cover the 21 open windowpanes. Rain and hail blew into the house in a couple of rooms and several puddles of water had to be mopped up.

The following Monday, a professional glazier came to the house and measured, cut, tapped and replaced 21 missing panes—to the tune of \$150.

*Benny Nichols
Arafat
Surry-Yadkin EMC*

MOTHER NATURE LENDS A HAND

One day, years ago, my parents decided to paint the house a new shade of white. After visiting Home Depot, they started to paint the siding that encased the house.

They finished an entire side by about 5 p.m. They neglected, however, to check the weather forecast. Dark storm clouds brought disaster. Rain soaked the siding, washing off the still-wet paint, and ruining all of my parents' hard work.

This disaster showed them the importance of planning a project. They started again the next day, taking care that the weather forecast was clear, lest they ruin another paint job.

*Matthew Peterson
Matthews*

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HOOKER RED VS. HUNTER GREEN

When my husband and I finally found a house we could afford, I was ecstatic. This meant we wouldn't have to rent, and I could paint my walls any color I wanted.

After getting what seemed like a million paint samples, I narrowed it down to a deep cranberry/burgundy. I was going to paint the wall one color and then "rag roll" the deeper color on top. It took a lot of effort on my part to convince my husband that this was the "perfect" color. He wanted to paint the room hunter green. Green was a bold step to him, but cranberry was a leap of faith. He finally agreed, and I called my sister, an experienced rag-roller, to come help while John went to work.

We put the first swipe of paint on the wall and gasped. Whew! It was bright. "Don't worry," my sister said. "When you add darker color, this is going to be really pretty."

When my husband came home, he had the same devastated look that I had. In my mind I knew it looked like the "red light district," but somehow I hoped that other people would think it looked better. The first thing everyone blurted out before they had a chance to be polite was, "This looks like hooker red!"

Needless to say, we now have a beautiful hunter green room.

*Anna Robinson
Wingate
Union Power Cooperative*

UNDRESSED FOR THE JOB

About four years ago, we decided to replace the worn vinyl in our foyer and hallway with wood plank flooring (the glue-down type).

As we started, I noticed that my husband had on his best jean shorts and a good shirt. I reminded him that he needed to change into old clothing. Instead, he shed all but his jockey shorts. Since it was hot and humid out, we decided to cut the few planks that needed to be cut in the kitchen and proceeded to put down newspaper to collect the sawdust.

As we worked, we prided ourselves on the job we were doing and lack of mess, but as we progressed toward the narrow hallway, it became harder to keep from getting in the glue.

My husband accidentally stepped in glue as he went to cut another plank. Of course, the sawdust (and the newspaper we had put down to collect it) stuck to his feet. When we finished, his nice, curly-haired legs and arms were covered with glue and the tools were a sticky mess. The sight of my underwear-clad husband stuck to sawdust and newspaper sent me into gales of laughter.

Days later, he was still plucking glue from his arms and legs but the floor turned out to be a beautiful piece of work. It was well worth the mess and provided the best laugh I'd had in a long time.

*Judy Wood
Havelock
Carteret-Craven EC*

ONE YEAR TO REMODEL 100 YEARS

Many generations lived in the house after my great-grandmother bought it in 1897. It was a house of love, fun, fellowship and food.

In 2000, my family began remodeling the house. What we expected to be a six-week job became a year-long project.

The appearance changed, but the charm and warmth of the house remained. The old has not passed away; it has been refined with hard work.

*Kathryn A. Wise
Vale
Rutherford EMC*



A year-long remodeling project took an 1897 kitchen (top) into the year 2000.

Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

APRIL 2004

"The Camping Trip I Will Never Forget"

Where was it and what happened? Send pictures.

Deadline: Feb. 15

MAY 2004

"What We Did When the Power Went Out"

Smart – and maybe not-so-smart – ways to cope during an outage.

Deadline: March 15

JUNE 2004

"Being a Teenager Today"

What are you going through? Or: How does it compare to when you were one?

Deadline: April 15

JULY 2004

"Our Money Pit"

What was the biggest waste of money you remember?

Deadline: May 15

AUGUST 2004

"Was I Wrong!"

Lessons you learned the hard way.

Deadline: June 15

SEPTEMBER 2004

"My Favorite Photo"

North Carolina people and places. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and printable size.

Deadline: July 15

OCTOBER 2004

"If I Were Governor of North Carolina"

What would you do?

Deadline: August 15

NOVEMBER 2004

"Mama's Cooking Was Always the Best"

Send a recipe, if you have one, and photos.

Deadline: Sept. 15

DECEMBER 2004

"Meeting Your Grandparents"

Something you never knew about a grandparent.

Deadline: Oct. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less. We retain reprint rights.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mail or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616. Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com. Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com