

WELL THATCHED

Cosy thatched cottages with roses around the door are the Hampshire idyll. But come winter, make sure you're chocolate box home is protected with these tips from Karen Crouch at the Thatch Advice Centre



THE THATCH

Check your roof – usually leaks or areas of concern should have been dealt with by now but even so, have a walk around and take a good look to make sure there has been no recent vermin, birds or other areas of concern for which you may want to contact a Master Thatcher. If your roof is looking a bit tired it does not necessarily mean it needs maintenance work. A regular inspection means you are in a position to notice any deterioration and deal with it before it becomes a major problem.

When you call in a Master Thatcher, understand that there is no overall governing body for thatchers and membership to associations and societies is just that. Be sure to ask around for recommendations, get references and get at least three quotes for any work being done to compare like for like. Make sure you know beforehand whether scaffolding is included in the price, whether they are insured, how long the job will take and ask them to prove their reliability. Think about what service you are looking for and what your priorities are so you can make an informed decision.

INSURANCE

As the temperatures drop and you start to think about lighting that fire, check your insurance

cover and paperwork are correct. Ensure the rebuild costs are right along with details of any wood burner installations. Check your electric certificates and that your thatch condition report is up to date, and make sure you have a valid fire retardant spray/barrier and chimney sweeping certificate. It is important for insurance and your peace of mind that everything is in order.

FIRE SAFETY

First of all, don't worry! Thatch is not more likely to catch fire than any other roofing - it is just harder to put out if it does, as it is designed to shed water. The important thing to remember is that the main proven cause of thatch fires is ejected embers from the chimney, so reduce the risk and satisfy your insurer's requirements.

Sweep your chimneys regularly and burn only seasoned wood to reduce risk. Take more care if you have a wood burner, as they burn hotter, and a low chimney – try spraying a fire retardant such as Magma Firestop to protect your thatch. I wouldn't recommend a spark arrester unless you are able to regularly clean it without damaging the thatch.

For any particular concerns, The Fire Service may be willing to do a fire safety check, or you can download further information online at www.thatchadvicecentre.co.uk 



GET IN TOUCH

The Thatch Advice Centre's wide network of thatch experts have been helping visitors for nearly 10 years. They have just launched a new Thatch Directory and are starting to populate it with thatch specialists to speed up introductions. Sign up for their free newsletter, like them on Facebook and join the growing thatch community. Call for more information on 02380 428058 or email info@thatchadvicecentre.co.uk.