

### Enter our sunflower contest

Growing sunflowers this summer? Keep nurturing them, give them plenty of sunshine and water and you just may have a winner.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and English Gardens are sponsoring their second annual High Hopes Sunflower Contest. First-, second- and third-place finishers for the tallest plant and widest seed head categories will be awarded.

Winners will receive \$75, \$50 or \$25 gift certificates from English Gardens. Check the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for entry forms, or call (724) 953-2105 for information.

The deadline for entries is Monday, Aug. 27. The top entries in length and seed head for the 2001 season will be verified by judges. Prizes will be awarded Sunday, Sept. 16, at English Gardens in West Bloomfield.

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### HOME WORK

# Clean, save money on repairs

#### APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

She wanted to know if she should purchase a new one. After a few pointed questions, I discovered that this homeowner had never cleaned the condenser, not even once in all of these past 22 years. I informed her how to do the job and called her later that night to find out

whether it did any good. This lady was jumping with excitement as she told me everything started freezing again and that I had saved her the cost of a new refrigerator. I hung up the phone and I thought about how many service calls are performed on products which are simply dirty.

#### Look at the owner's manual

I think that many consumers who purchase an appliance or for that matter any product will take it home and give little thought to the owner's operating manual. Some just place it in a drawer hoping to read it when they find a little time, others take a quick glance at it to make sure they know how to turn it on and off, and few take the time to read every word of it.

I'm guilty of this with our cordless telephone when the

other day I couldn't find it. It wasn't until Valorie came home and hit the page button on the base unit and the phone started ringing. (I still cannot figure out how it got inside the refrigerator beside the cold pop.)

Let me give you a list of dirt problems, just from the top of my head and what they can do to your appliances, which could result in money spent on a service call and labor. If you have any questions or don't understand what you can do to solve these problems, please contact me and I will be glad to explain it to you.

#### Dirty problems

■ Dirty condenser under the refrigerator - Clean it every four months using a long handle condenser brush and vacuum cleaner or cavity tool. This condition can burn out the compressor and cause a great increase in your utility bill.

■ Dirty, plugged-up vent line from your clothes dryer - Clean it twice a year by removing it completely. This is the big cause of some 15,000 house fires a year in this country.

■ Dirty drain lines from the dishwasher to the garbage disposals - Remove the connection at the disposer and clean out the neck with a plain screw driver. This is a common service call when the dishwasher does not pump out all the water in the bottom of the dishwasher.

■ Dirty screens inside the washing machine water valve - Remove the two hoses which connect into the back of the washer. Pull out the screens with eye-brow tweezers and use an old toothbrush to clean them. These plugged screens can cause a very long wash cycle as water does not enter the machine as quickly as it should.

■ Dirty surfaces inside of a microwave - Clean with a non-abrasive cleaner, warm water and let dry. Food splatters which are continually cooked every time will harden to a rock-like material and can ruin the paint surface. They will also cause arcing and can cause damage to the magnetron tube which is the heart of the product.

When the need arises for a service technician to visit your home, I'm sure you have thought of everything you could do to prevent it. You already know it's going to be expensive and it's almost maddening when he or she corrects the problem by cleaning something you could have done yourself. The first step is always reading the operating manual and the next is reading this newspaper. Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can be heard Saturday and Sunday on 760 WJZ. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (313) 873-9769.

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