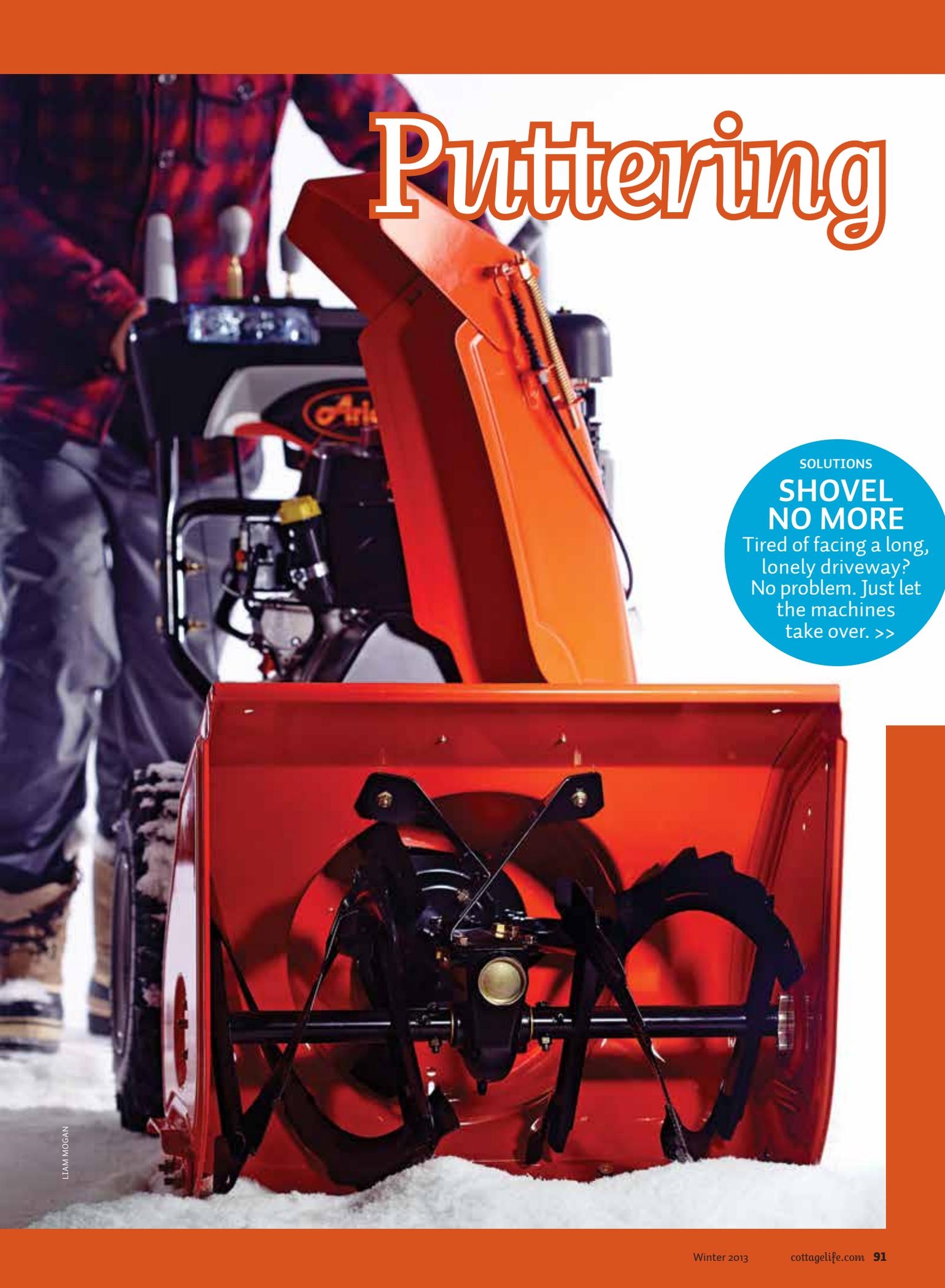


# Puttering



SOLUTIONS

## SHOVEL NO MORE

Tired of facing a long,  
lonely driveway?  
No problem. Just let  
the machines  
take over. >>

## >> SOLUTIONS

Cottage snow blowers are to city models as a wolf is to a Labrador retriever: tougher and stronger. When drifts pile up between cottage visits, snow removal is best left to heftier “dual-stage” units rather than urban “single-stage” and electric snow throwers, according to Jeff Adams, manager of Hamelin’s Outdoor Power Equipment in North Bay. Single-stage means rubber blades toss snow directly out the chute. Dual-stage machines have a metal auger that feeds snow to a high-speed impeller that flings it farther and more efficiently.

Adams says a typical cottage machine is \$900–\$2,000, with a 10 hp engine that clears a 28" swath and an electric start (easier than the pull-cord, especially when it’s cold). Nice-to-have features include tires with aggressive treads, engine-driven wheels (with assisted steering or a differential), a headlight, and heated grips. The buyer’s main trade-off is time versus effort. A 33"-wide machine will clear a single-lane drive in, say, five passes, but it’s heavier and more awkward to muscle around. Meanwhile, the owner of a 24" or 26" blower will take an extra run or two to clear the same area, but with less labour, Adams says. “For a guy in his thirties, a 33" blower might work well, but if you’re 65, it might be a lot of machine to handle.”

While you’re shopping, ask about the machine’s durability and capacity. Neil Grieve, parts and services manager of W.E. Enterprises in Mississauga, says pricier units feature a more powerful engine and heavier construction (Ariens snow blowers, for example, have a cast-iron gearbox, not the more common aluminum model). A higher-end machine will have a larger auger and impeller, which means more capacity than a same-sized economy blower. —Ray Ford



The smartest way to keep your machine happy? Before stowing it for the summer, fill it with fresh gas and fuel stabilizer and run it for five minutes, says Doug Ogilvie of Cottage Country Small Engine Repair in Orillia. Stale gas, closely followed by worn belts, is the number one cause of breakdowns.

Keep your snow blower’s engine purring by changing the oil once a year.

Check drive belts frequently for wear. Always have spare belts and shear bolts on hand.

Protect your investment by storing your machine under cover.

Wash off salt and sand at the end of the season, and wipe metal parts with a light oil.

## Power-ups you want (and may even need)

### 1

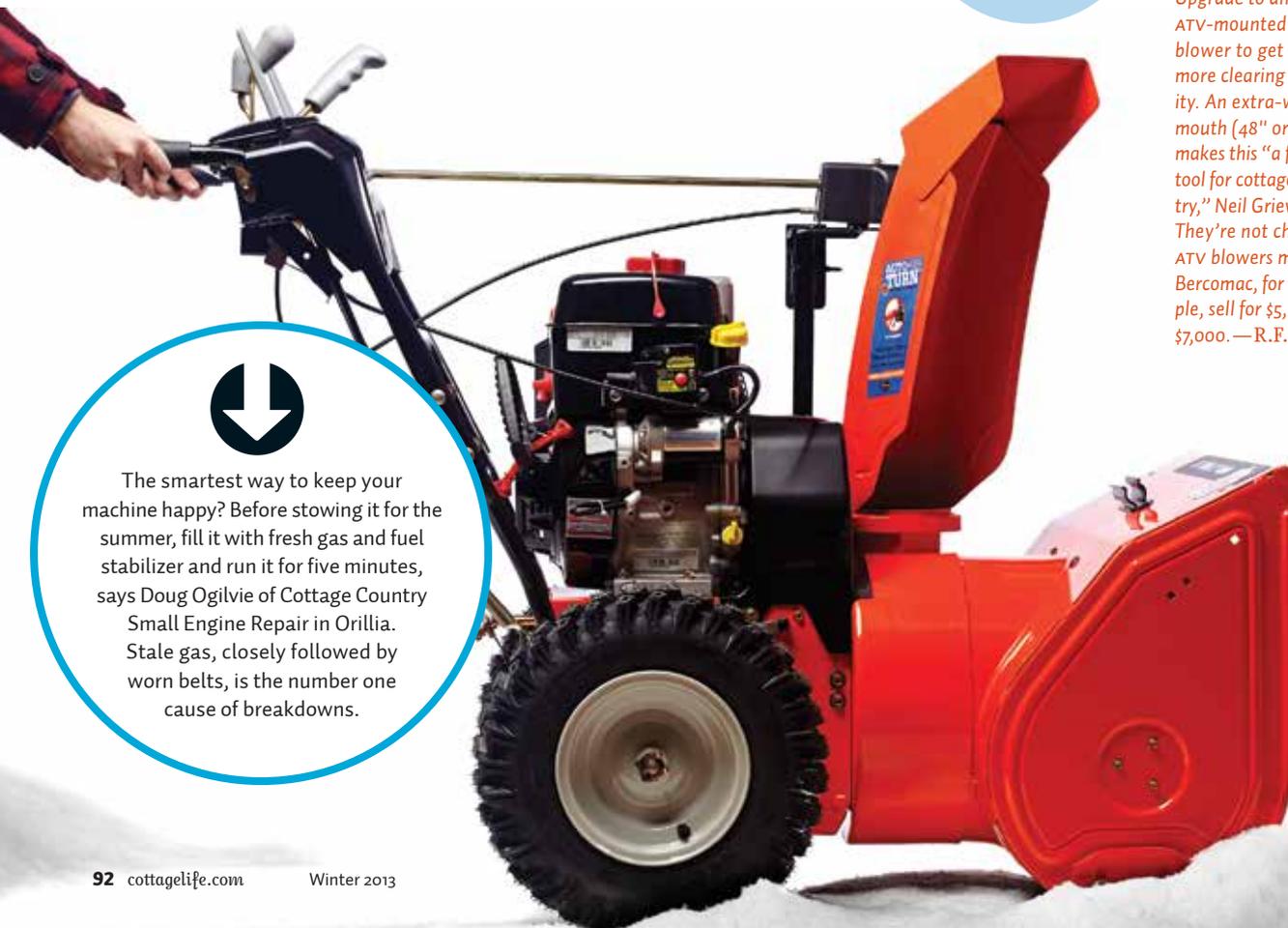
Upgrade to tank-style tracks, instead of wheels, for added stability on slopes and to cross rough terrain. They cost about \$500 more than wheeled units, so most cottagers roll with tires.

### 2

Upgrade to hydrostatic transmission so you can fine-tune speed to snow conditions with the push of a lever. This \$500 to \$1,000 feature is less common than standard transmission, which has six forward gears and two reverse speeds.

### 3

Upgrade to an ATV-mounted snow blower to get even more clearing capacity. An extra-wide mouth (48" or more) makes this “a fabulous tool for cottage country,” Neil Grieve says. They’re not cheap: ATV blowers made by Bercomac, for example, sell for \$5,000 to \$7,000. —R.F.





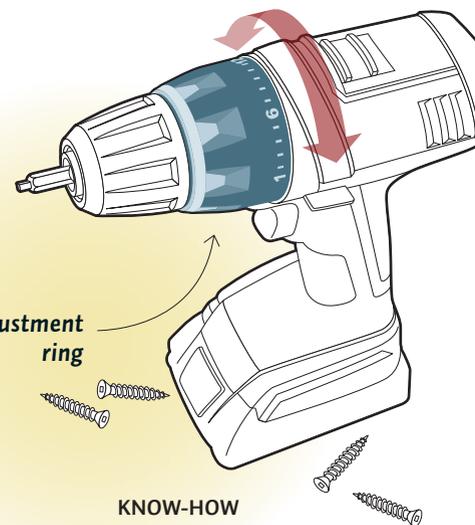
Dave Chambers reinforced the frame with extra rails and legs.



GREAT INVENTION

## Lumber support

There's a bed at Dave Chambers' Pine Lake cottage where occupants always sleep like logs (even if the guy next door is sawing them). "We used to stack firewood beside the cottage, but the wood on the ground would rot," says the eastern Ontario cottager. Thanks to his welding skills and a retired bed, Chambers has now laid that problem to rest. The solution replaces the mattress and box spring with firmer support: racks welded from hook-on bed frame rails and square steel tubing. After buying an extra set of rails at a thrift shop, Chambers cut off their hooks and joined them to the original rails using  $\frac{3}{4}$ " square tubing. To carry the weight of the wood, he added legs, also made from square tubing, in the centre of each rack. Now Chambers' firewood reclines off the ground, where air circulation helps it season quickly, and his wife, Helen, can offer visitors another place to nap. "She always tells them, 'Here's our spare bed,'" Chambers says.—R.F.



KNOW-HOW

## Driving clutch

You've probably twiddled a cordless drill's clutch adjustment ring, just behind the chuck, and wondered how best to use it. The ring controls how much resistance (torque) on a bit will cause the clutch to disengage the drive, accompanied by a clicking sound. Dial a low number and the drill easily clutches out; turn it up and the drill will give 'er all it's got.



➤ For more inventions, and to send in your great ideas, visit [cottagelife.com/inventions](http://cottagelife.com/inventions)

Dial down low for small screws, which can snap when over-torqued; soft-metal screws, such as the rustproof brass ones that look great on a Muskoka chair; or anything easily stripped, such as screw clamps.

The clutch can also control screw depth, useful for building a deck or installing vinyl siding (screws must hold siding loosely to allow seasonal movement). But be careful with drywall: The clutch is not so precise that it will dependably prevent sinking screws through the paper surface.—Martin Zibauer

PHOTOS: COURTESY DAVE CHAMBERS. ILLUSTRATION: JACQUES PERRAULT

## SKILL SET

# Play down the flaw

I like plywood: It's economical and stable, can be cut to any size, and comes in grades, thicknesses, and surface veneers that work for bookshelves, cabinets, tabletops, and many other projects. But it has an ugly flaw: its unfinished edge.—Wayne Lennox

### Iron-on edge banding

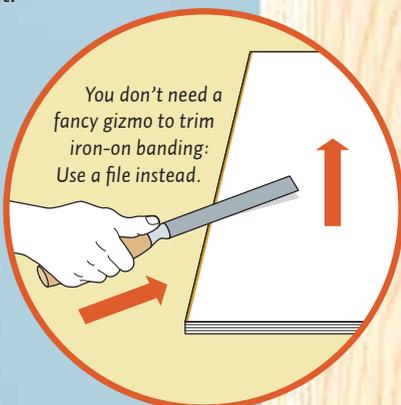
Where edges aren't prominent or damage prone—cabinet shelves, painted projects—iron-on edge banding is an easy-to-apply option. Banding is available in many woods and in melamine. Buy a roll that's slightly wider than the plywood edge.

- 1] Cut a banding strip about 1" overlength.
- 2] Clamp the plywood in place. With an iron on its hottest setting, iron on about 6" of banding. Rub down the hot banding with a wood block, tilting the block slightly to adhere the edges.
- 3] Continue ironing and rubbing, covering some old ground with each pass.
- 4] To cut off the end of the strip, position the banded edge down on a flat surface and score from the back with a utility knife.

5] I trim the banding's long edges with a flat file. Hold the file at a diagonal, almost resting on the plywood's veneer. Always file towards the plywood, working carefully to avoid scratches. (A utility knife or a veneer-trimming gadget doesn't work here for me; the blade can wander and damage the banding edge or the veneer.)

6] Sand lightly, easing corners and removing any glue squeeze-out.

**TIP** If the banding lifts over time, don't come unglued. Just iron it back down.



**TIP**  
Attach solid-wood edging to an overlength piece of plywood, if possible, so you can cut plywood and trim to length in one go.

### Solid-wood edging

Use a solid-wood edging strip where your sheet will get knocked around, or if you plan to rout a decorative profile on the edge.

- 1] Rip a strip, as thick as you like, from wood that matches or contrasts with the plywood veneer. Make the strip slightly wider than the plywood edge.
- 2] If you have several bar clamps, you can use glue alone to secure the edging strip: Put pieces of scrap wood between the clamps and the strip to spread clamping pressure evenly. Or secure the strip with glue and a few brads, but remember that filled nail holes always show. After clamping, wipe away glue squeeze-out.
- 3] Trim the top and bottom edges with a router fitted with an edge-trimming bit, or use a good block plane, being very careful not to gouge the veneer.
- 4] Sand, easing the corners.

### No time for edging?

**USE THIS** One type of plywood needs no edge trim: Baltic birch plywood is composed of thin veneer layers, so its edges are clean and void-free, with a subtle, regular stripe. It costs about 50 per cent more than ordinary birch veneer plywood, but is worth it.

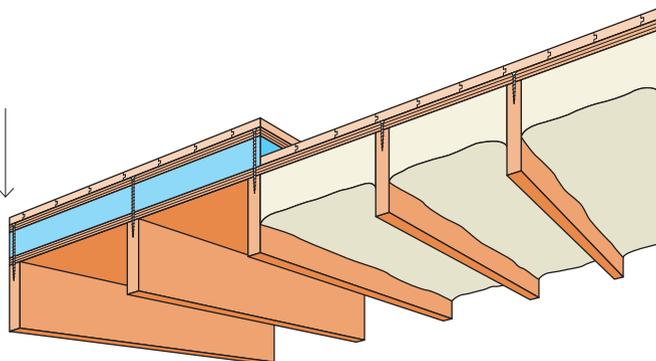
PHOTO: LIAM MOGAN. ROUTER COURTESY RYOBI. ILLUSTRATION: JACQUES PERRAULT

THIS NOT THAT

# Cozy floor plans

Are cold feet giving you cold feet about winter weekends at the lake? If there's no heated basement below, raised floors are usually as chilly as the wind between your piers. Insulation alone won't make a floor barefoot friendly, but the right insulation can mean slippers are all you need. —Steve Maxwell

Leave a gap between rigid foam and the wall. A can of spray foam will seal it tight.



**[DO THIS]**  
**Rigid foam**

Sheets of 2" extruded polystyrene foam over a subfloor make an excellent insulation option—if you're planning a new finished floor anyway. Rigid foam (with 5/8" plywood on top) is warm, solid, and vermin-proof, and it can support plywood without strapping. Anchor the foam and plywood to the joists with 4" deck screws.

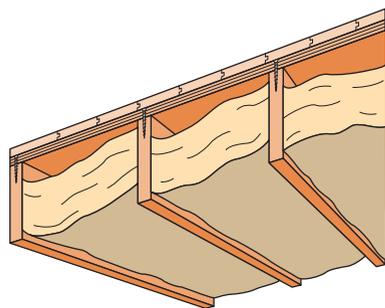
Use 3/4"-thick spacers to create a gap between the foam sheets and walls, and use a can of spray foam insulation to fill the gap and prevent air leakage.

**[OR THIS]**  
**Spray foam**

Closed-cell foam, sprayed onto the subfloor's underside, makes sense if you're not installing a new finished floor and if there's enough room to work under the cottage. Nothing seals gaps and cracks like spray foam, so it blocks drafts as well as insulates. You'll find spray-foam insulation contractors in some cottage communities, or you can use a portable spray-foam kit yourself. For best results, warm the contents to about 28°C, and spray onto surfaces warmer than 15°C.

**[NOT THAT]**  
**Batt insulation**

Familiarity is why stuffing batt insulation between floor joists is the most common strategy, but it has four significant drawbacks in this application: Batts don't prevent heat loss very well when the wind whistles through them; mice love to nest in them; they can attract and hold moisture against floor framing; and they always jiggle downwards over time, falling out unless the joist bays are well packed and the batts are supported by plywood, another sheet material, or chicken wire.



Carpenter ant infestation is the main risk with spray foam. Since it's so easy to tunnel through, ants will sometimes choose exposed foam over wood for making nests.



#1

JOB JAR

## 3 do-it-now plank fixes

Is your wood floor underperforming? It's time to fix these common problems.

**FIX #1** If gaps between rustic floor planks are so wide that your pets are going missing, try this old boat-building trick. Caulk between boards with natural-fibre rope or cord (sisal, hemp, or jute), sized to fit the gaps. For a stained floor, dip the cord in matching stain. Let it dry before seating it in the gap with a flat screwdriver, a putty knife, or a spline roller. The look is rustic, but it's easy—commercial fillers, mixes of sawdust and floor finish, and wood strips or wedges glued in place—won't allow seasonal movement.

**FIX #2** Don't ignore a dangerous splinter; fix it with a little wood glue. After wiping up the excess glue, weigh down the splinter with a pail of water on a board. (Waxed paper will stop the board from sticking to the floor.) Rout out any really bad splinters. A 1/4"-deep mortise will suffice; glue in a matching patch.

**FIX #3** Nagging nail pops? Cinch down a face-nailed floorboard with a ring-shanked flooring nail or a trim screw, which has a smaller head than other screws. Fill any holes with matching putty, then put on your dancing shoes. —Michel Roy