

Annie's Mailbox

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Suggestions for opening pull-tab lids

Dear Annie: You were right when you told "Al in the Midwest" that octogenarians aren't the only ones having trouble opening pull-tab lids. My 55-year-old daughter taught me to turn the cans upside down and use a regular can opener. It works unless the can has a rounded bottom.

As for items sealed in plastic-and-cardboard packaging, the solution to opening them is a Widget, an inexpensive scraper and cutter manufactured by the Gillette Co.

— Lee in the East

Dear Lee: We were swamped with replies from readers eager to help "Al" open things. Several readers recommended specific brand-name products, and although we are happy to mention them, we have no idea if they work or not, so caveat emptor (buyer beware). Here's more:

From Sun City, Ariz.: Put the can on the counter with the tab toward you. Pry up the tab with a spoon, then insert one of the handles of a metal garlic-crusher and let the end rest against the edge on the other side. Hold the can firmly on the counter and then pull up the lid.

Southwest: Tell "Al" to visit a kitchen supply store. It likely has several types of pull-tab openers for sale like the kind airline flight attendants use.

Illinois: "Al" should look in the pet food section of his local supermarket. I was trying to save my fingernails when I found a plastic utensil for opening pet food cans for my cat.

Binghamton, N.Y.: To open a tab can, look through your kitchen utensil drawer and find a long handle that will go through the hole in the tab and use this as a lever. To open a pickle or jelly jar, poke a tiny hole in the tin cover, carefully, with a pointed knife or an ice pick. When it "pops," you're home free. I have no solutions for medicine capsules in plastic packaging.

South Carolina: There is a \$3.99 item on the market that allows one to hook onto a pull tab and open the can easily. Check the Web site dynamic-living.com and click on "Arthritis." For jar lids, try Dycem matting, available at most occupational therapy departments and restaurant supply stores. An X-ACTO knife is good for opening plastic-sealed medication.

Boston: Before leaving the store, we octogenarians should ask the sales clerk to open the shrink-wrapped products for us. A tough one for me is ink cartridges for my printer. And it's impossible to get a battery out of the package. A lot of us live alone and can't simply hand these things to someone and say, "Here. Open this for me."

Center Line, Mich.: "Al" should check at a local Home Healthcare store in his area. They have many products to help people who are having difficulties with simple daily activities. There is a product called the "Purrfect Opener" by B.A. Maze Inc. that works for opening pill bottles, plastic packaging and lift-tabs on cans. It's also a pill splitter. If you check the Web site at www.purrfectopener.com (1-800-708-OPEN) (1-800-708-6736), you can probably find a local store that carries it.

N. Smithfield, R.I.: I solved the problem by buying a Can Claw for \$5.95 from Home Trends (hometrendscatalog.com) at 1-800-810-2340.

Chicago: After using the screwdriver-and-pliers method, I ended up with tomato soup all over the counter and me, but I still couldn't get the pull-tab off. I called the 800 number on the can and told them how sad I was that I would no longer be able to use their soup. Maybe if enough of us call and let them know they are losing customers, they'd correct the problem.

Please send your questions via e-mail to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, P.O. Box 118190, Chicago, IL 60611.

THE SPIRIT OF THE OLD WEST



'COWBOY CHIC'

At left, these valances in the author's bedroom in Tehachapi are made of serapes sewn together end to end and draped over a painted closet rod. Total cost: under \$50. Below, cowboy boots, big and small, live up an uninteresting corner in Jack and Elaine Palance's Tehachapi home. Look for them at garage sales.

Western decor can be fun, easy

By CHELLEY KITZMILLER
 Special to the Valley Press

There's no place like home — a Western home that is. I'm not talking about a home located in the West, I'm talking about a home decorated Western. It doesn't matter where you live — New York, Georgia, or Arizona — or what you do for a living (stockbroker, construction worker, or receptionist) — if the spirit of the West is alive in your heart, then maybe a Western decor is for you.

Return with me now to yesteryear as Ben Cartwright and his sons gather in the living room of their Ponderosa Ranch to discuss the latest cattle rustler or homesteader. The room is dominated by a massive stone fireplace with an opening nearly big enough to hold a cord of wood.

The smoke-blackened mantle is fronted with a pair of mounted longhorns to remind visitors what the Ponderosa is all about. Facing the fireplace a red and white striped Victorian sofa and a pair of man-sized, red leather chairs beckon guests to come sit a spell.

Though just a set, the Cartwrights' living room exemplified the Old West. Granted, not the real Old West, but the Old West of our imaginations, our hearts and Hollywood. You can bet the set designers knew exactly what they were doing when they built and furnished the living room and all the other rooms that the cameras took us into.

The stone fireplace conjured up images of a rugged, outdoor life. The hand-hewn mantle and the longhorns spoke of hard work and a way to earn a living. The Victorian sofa reminded us that, like Ben Cartwright, most Westerners were Easterners first. The red chairs evoked feelings of warmth and comfort at the end of a long day of herding cattle.

"There's a lot more heart in Western decorating than any other kind," says former interior designer Elaine Palance. "It's a classic style that is forever."

If anybody knows what Western decorating is all about, it's the wife of wild west superstar and Academy Award winner Jack Palance. The Palances' home is an eclectic mix of accessories and collectibles. Boots, saddles, spurs and hides are displayed with Lalique, Moroccan and Lladro.

"Western decorating started as function over form," Elaine said, referring to the trappings created by the men and women who settled the West. "The careless tossing of boots taken off after a long day of riding has become a 'look' that says Old West."

Finding Western furniture and accessories is not the challenge it used to be. But if you want your rooms to have "heart," you need to haunt junk and antique stores, get up early and hit the garage sales and flea markets and explore the back of your local feed store. That's where the treasures are.

Old cowboy boots have far more character than new ones. They've been places, seen things. Collecting them — all sizes, all makers — can be fun and make for a unique decorating focal point.

Cutting horse competitor Margie Sweetland hired a decorator to "Westernize" her new home. "The woman was at a total loss as to what constituted Western decor," said Margie. "When she brought a huge flower arrangement that looked like it belonged in a jungle, I knew it wasn't going to work, so I decided to do it myself."

Margie started with a leather couch and chair. "Leather is comfortable and I like the smell." Little by little she added accessories, some of them coming right out of her closet and tack room.

Margie prefers earthy colors and lots of wood. When she gets a better handle on how she wants her living room, she'll paint the walls an earthy color and go looking for that perfect Western scene for over the couch.

If bold and brazen color is more to your liking, grab

See OLD WEST on D2



WESTERN TREASURES

Just because you live in a tract home and not the Ponderosa doesn't mean you can't feel like you live in the Old West. At left, who says you have to have a nightstand next to a bed? Surprise yourself and your visitors and use your antiques for things they were never meant for. Above, add drama to any room by painting the ceiling a cinnamon red and then stenciling, like the Palances.



COLORFUL COLLECTION

There's nothing like morning light coming through a collection of old and new bottles to brighten your day. This is the clear picture the author had in her head when she remodeled her kitchen and the only one that worked out exactly as she envisioned it.