

# HOME STYLE

## THE HOT WATER BOTTLE

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

Even with the advent of electric blankets and central heating, there will always be a place in our beds for the hot water bottle. Boil and decant a kettle, burp the bottle carefully, evicting air without spurting hot water over your hands, screw the tap on, tuck it under your arm and you have a friend for the night. (We shall ignore the bit in the morning when it becomes cold and hostile and you have to kick it out of bed.)

The hot water bottle's size is its strength: it can be shifted from toes to tum with the greatest of ease, dispensing localised heat and comfort as it goes. The electric blanket with its all-encompassing, regulated temperature is all very well but you can't put it on a sprained calf muscle or curl around it and feel its warmth permeate to your very core.

The localised heat of a hot water bottle means that it is also a heat compress: apply it to a painful or sprained area and it will provide temporary relief. According to Brian King, a lecturer of physiology at University College, London, this is because, "The heat deactivates the pain



*"It can be shifted from toes to tum with greatest of ease"*

at a molecular level in much the same way as pharmaceutical painkillers." So now you know.

There have, of course, been bed warmers since the 16th century but these were clunky devices – made of metal and filled with hot coals, they had to be removed from the bed before occupancy, otherwise burns were likely. Later versions made from earthenware and wood were wrapped in cloth to prevent scalding and lurked beneath the covers, taking up space and stubbing toes. It took until 1903 for the hot water bottle to be manufactured. The Croatian inventor, Eduard Penkala, made one from rubber which enabled it to stay in bed all night. Protected by a wool cover, it soon became part of the domestic arsenal against the cold.

Hot water bottle usage may have declined, but it is still evolving: modern versions are filled with polymer gel and heated in the microwave. There will always be a place for one in the British home: at this time of year, little is more cheering than the phrase "I've put a hot water bottle in your bed." Hear that and you know that a pocket of warmth and comfort lies ahead. **S**

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## THE UPDATE



THE CLASSIC

**1.5 litre rubber hot water bottle | £6**  
The original, plain HWB. Best used with a cover, obsv. [hotwaterbottleshop.com](http://hotwaterbottleshop.com)



TWO GREAT TWISTS

**Snowy White Owl hottie | £19.99**  
Microwaveable so no messing about with kettles. A hoot. [aromahome.com](http://aromahome.com)



**Woodland Rose hot water bottle | £25**  
A prettily-sprigged quilted cover (hot water bottle included). [cathkidston.com](http://cathkidston.com)