

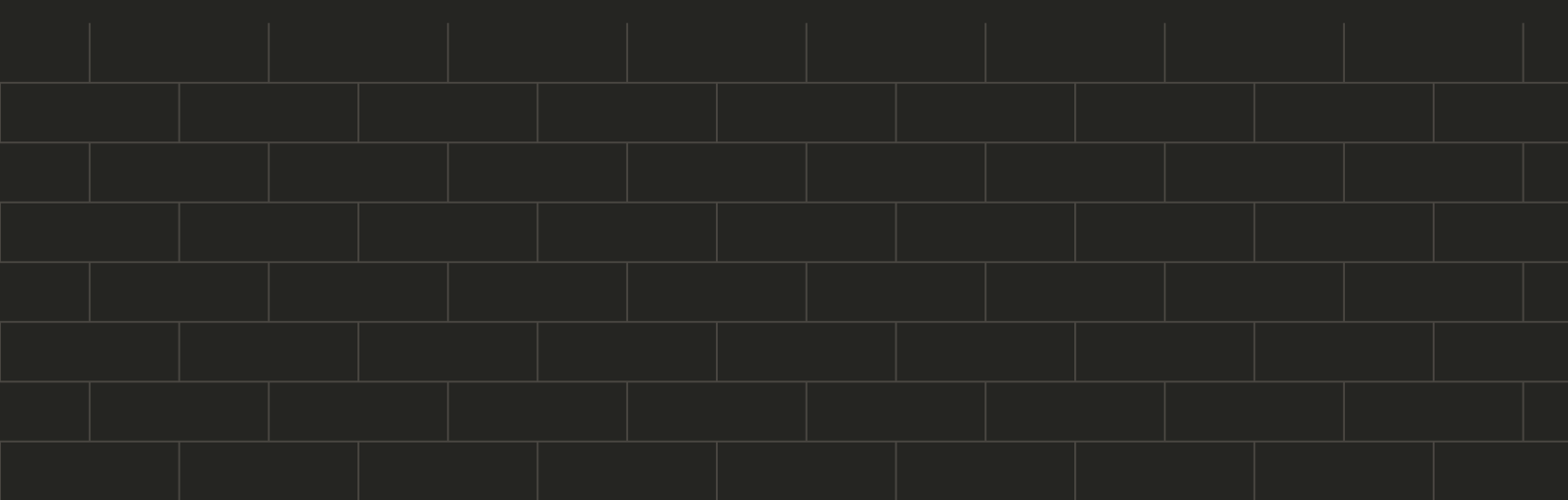


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CAMULODUNUM PRESERVATION

The Colchester Homeowner's Damp Check Guide

What the signs may mean, what to check,
and when to get specialist help.



Find the source before treating the symptom.

Start here: observe first, diagnose later

A damp patch tells you that unwanted moisture is present. It does **not** tell you, by itself, why it is there. Condensation, rainwater penetration, plumbing leaks, ground moisture and timber decay can produce overlapping signs.

The most useful first step

Record **where** the problem is, **when** it appears, and **what changes it**. A patch that worsens after rain tells a different story from mould that forms mainly on cold winter mornings.

Five things worth noting

- ☐ **Location:** external wall, chimney breast, ceiling, window reveal, skirting level, behind furniture?
- ☐ **Timing:** all year, only in winter, after heavy rain, after showers, after plumbing use?
- ☐ **Appearance:** black spotting, brown stain, tide mark, white salts, blistering paint, soft timber?
- ☐ **Smell:** musty, earthy or no smell at all?
- ☐ **Change:** is it spreading, returning after cleaning, or staying in one localised spot?

Take photos before cleaning or redecorating

Photographs can help you compare changes over time and may help a specialist understand the pattern. Government guidance also recommends documenting visible mould before removal so the location and extent are recorded.

This guide is for observation, not self-diagnosis

The aim is to help you gather useful information and spot obvious maintenance issues. It cannot confirm the cause of damp, assess structural condition, or replace an in-person survey where one is needed.

What are you actually seeing?

Patterns are clues, not proof. Use the table below as a way to describe what you see rather than as a diagnosis.

Sign	Useful questions
Black or green mould spots	Is it in corners, around windows, behind furniture or on cold external walls?
Water on windows	Mostly mornings or after cooking/showering? Are trickle vents or extract fans working?
Brown/yellow stain	Is there a roof, gutter, pipe, bathroom or chimney above/near it? Does rain make it worse?
Low-level wall staining	How high does it reach? Is plaster crumbling? Are outside ground levels unusually high?
Peeling paint / bubbling plaster	Is the area cold, wet to touch, salty, or linked to an exterior defect?
White crystalline deposits	Are they on masonry/plaster? Have they returned after brushing away?
Musty smell	One room or many? Stronger in cupboards, floor voids, cellars or behind furniture?
Soft / crumbling timber	Is the timber damp? Is there visible fungal growth, cracking, or persistent moisture nearby?

Useful pattern: after rain

If a mark consistently appears or worsens after wind-driven rain, inspect the outside of that area for defective pointing, cracked render, overflowing gutters, failed seals or roof defects. That still does not prove the cause, but it is a useful clue.

10-minute check inside the home

Walk the property slowly. You are looking for patterns and obvious moisture sources.

Windows, walls & furniture

- ☐ Check for regular morning condensation on windows and sills.
- ☐ Look behind large wardrobes, sofas and beds placed against external walls.
- ☐ Check cold corners, window reveals and the junction between ceilings and outside walls.
- ☐ Note rooms that are usually kept much colder than the rest of the home.
- ☐ Look for paint, wallpaper or plaster that is lifting repeatedly in the same place.

Bathrooms, kitchens & laundry

- ☐ Run extractor fans and check that they actually pull air.
- ☐ Check that vents and trickle vents are open and not painted shut or blocked.
- ☐ Look under sinks, baths, showers, toilets and appliances for slow leaks.
- ☐ Note whether clothes are routinely dried indoors and where.
- ☐ Check whether mould appears mainly after showering/cooking or through colder months.

Floors, cellars & timber

- ☐ Notice musty smells near suspended timber floors, cupboards, cellars or under-stair areas.
- ☐ Look for soft skirting, lifting floor finishes or visibly damp timber.
- ☐ Do not disturb suspicious fungal growth or significantly decayed structural timber.

Ventilation matters - but it is not the answer to every damp problem

Cooking, bathing, laundry and normal occupancy add moisture to indoor air. Poor ventilation can trap that moisture and increase condensation. But a leaking roof, failed gutter or plumbing leak needs the defect fixed, not simply more ventilation.

Then walk around the outside

Many internal damp problems are easier to understand once you look at the corresponding area outside.

Rainwater & roofline

- ☐ Blocked, leaking or overflowing gutters.
- ☐ Downpipes with split joints, staining, leaks or water discharging at the base of the wall.
- ☐ Missing/slipped roof tiles or obvious flashing defects visible safely from ground level.
- ☐ Flat-roof edges, parapets or junctions above the affected room.

Walls, render & openings

- ☐ Cracked or hollow-looking render.
- ☐ Open, eroded or damaged pointing.
- ☐ Failed sealant around windows and doors.
- ☐ Air bricks that are blocked, buried or covered.
- ☐ External taps, pipes or overflow outlets leaking against the wall.

Ground level

- ☐ Soil, paving or decking built unusually high against the wall.
- ☐ Standing water close to the property after rain.
- ☐ Recent landscaping that may have changed drainage around the building.

Stay safe

Do not climb onto roofs, enter unsafe voids, disturb suspect asbestos-containing materials, or open up structural elements just to investigate damp. A useful homeowner check should stay visual and low-risk.

Three common moisture patterns

These descriptions help you ask better questions. They are not a substitute for diagnosis.

Condensation

Warm, moisture-laden indoor air meets a colder surface and water forms. It is often more noticeable in colder months, around windows, external walls, corners and behind furniture. Ventilation, heating patterns, cold surfaces and indoor moisture generation all matter.

Penetrating damp

Water moves into the building through a defect or leak - for example damaged roof coverings, failed seals, defective masonry, gutters or plumbing. A localised patch that reacts to rain can be a useful clue.

Rising damp

Moisture from the ground can move into porous wall materials where an effective damp-resistant barrier is absent, bridged or compromised. Low-level staining alone is not enough to prove rising damp, because leaks, salts, condensation and external ground levels can mimic some signs.

What about mould?

Mould grows where there is enough moisture. Cleaning visible mould can reduce immediate exposure, but if the underlying moisture source remains, it can return. Government guidance stresses the importance of identifying and tackling the underlying causes rather than treating the surface alone.

If anyone is unwell

Damp and mould can affect health, especially the airways and lungs. If you are concerned about symptoms, seek medical advice. For rented homes, damp and mould concerns should also be reported to the landlord or managing agent promptly.

Older Colchester homes: construction matters

Colchester contains buildings from many periods. Older homes may use solid masonry walls, lime-based mortars or plasters, suspended timber floors and details that behave differently from modern cavity-wall construction.

A modern-looking finish can hide an older wall

Renovations over decades can add cement render, gypsum plaster, sealed paints, replacement windows, raised external paving or blocked ventilation. When moisture problems appear, it helps to understand the original construction as well as later alterations.

Useful questions for an older property

- ☐ Do you know roughly when the property was built?
- ☐ Are the external walls solid or cavity construction, if known?
- ☐ Has the property been rendered or repointed?
- ☐ Have windows recently been replaced or draught-proofing improved?
- ☐ Are suspended timber floors and air bricks still ventilated?
- ☐ Have outside ground levels or paving changed?
- ☐ Has the damp appeared after recent renovation work?

The goal is not to assume an old house 'needs to breathe' or that one material is always right. It is to recognise that construction type, past alterations and moisture movement should be considered together before treatment is specified.

Buying or selling a property with damp concerns

A survey mentioning damp can feel alarming, but 'damp' is a description of moisture, not a complete diagnosis. The useful next step is usually to clarify where it was found, what evidence was used, and what further investigation is recommended.

If you are buying

- ☐ Ask for the exact rooms and locations where moisture was noted.
- ☐ Read whether the survey identifies a likely cause or simply recommends further investigation.
- ☐ Look for recent redecoration that may obscure historic staining.
- ☐ Ask about previous leaks, roof/gutter repairs, flooding or damp treatment.
- ☐ If specialist work is recommended, obtain a clear scope before relying on a treatment quote.

If you are selling

- ☐ Document any known historic leak and repairs carried out.
- ☐ Avoid simply painting over active staining before viewings.
- ☐ If there is an unresolved issue, understanding the cause can make later conversations clearer.
- ☐ Keep invoices, reports or photos relating to previous repair work.

A treatment quote and an independent survey are not always the same thing

Where a property transaction depends on the outcome, ask what the inspection includes, what evidence supports the conclusion, and whether the person assessing the problem also sells the treatment being recommended.

Your room-by-room damp record

Print this page or use it as a template for notes and photos.

Room / area	What can you see?	When is it worst?	Photo #

Quick context notes

- ☐ Recent heavy rain / storm:
- ☐ Recent plumbing leak or bathroom/kitchen work:
- ☐ Recent new windows / insulation / draught proofing:
- ☐ Recent rendering / repointing / external landscaping:
- ☐ Mould cleaned before? If yes, did it return and how quickly?

When to get specialist help

A specialist assessment is useful when the cause is unclear, the problem keeps returning, timber appears affected, a property transaction depends on the issue, or the suspected repair is significant enough that you want evidence before spending money.

Before you call, have these ready

- ☐ Property postcode and approximate age, if known.
- ☐ Which rooms/areas are affected.
- ☐ When you first noticed the issue.
- ☐ Whether rain, cold weather, cooking/showering or plumbing use changes it.
- ☐ A few wide photos and close-ups.
- ☐ Any recent survey wording or previous damp-treatment paperwork.

Camulodunum Preservation principle

Find the source before treating the symptom.

A useful inspection should help explain what is happening, what evidence supports that view, and what proportionate next step makes sense.

Sources & further reading

UK Government: Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home (updated 1 April 2026).
gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-for-rented-housing-providers/

UK Government: Existing home ventilation guide (updated 24 March 2026).
gov.uk/government/publications/home-user-guide-template/existing-home-ventilation-guide

RICS: Damp and mould - consumer guide.
rics.org/consumer-guides/damp-and-mould

Important: This guide is general homeowner information. It does not diagnose a defect, certify a building, replace a structural or building survey, or provide medical or legal advice. If you are concerned about health symptoms, seek medical advice. If you rent your home, report damp and mould concerns to your landlord or managing agent.