

Early detection of a water leak can save you money and avert potential disaster. Here are some signs that you may have a leak and should consider contacting a plumber.

- 1. Check your water meter**

One of the best ways to tell if you have a leak in some part of your plumbing is to check the water meter. To do this, you'll first have to turn off all the water in your home. Shut off all faucets, and make sure the dishwasher and washing machine are not running. Next, watch the meter and see if it begins to change. If it does, you likely have a fast-moving leak. If the meter doesn't change immediately, wait two hours and check it again. If it has changed despite all the water being off, you may be dealing with a slower leak. The leak could be anywhere after the meter, or even underground. Remember that all piping after the water main is a homeowner's responsibility.

- 2. Look at your usage**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends checking your winter water usage to find out if a leak is occurring somewhere in your home. If a family of four is using more than 12,000 gallons of water per month, there's probably have a serious leak problem somewhere in your plumbing system.

- 3. Monitor your bill**

If your bill is rising consistently but your water use habits haven't changed, a leak may be to blame. Gather some bills from the past few quarters and compare them to see if there's a steady increase. Your water bill should remain within the same range quarter to quarter. Remember that some of your pipes may be under ground. You may never detect leaks in this part of your system, but you will always pay for them. It's best to have a professional plumber make a thorough check of all the pipes. A warm spot on the floor (with under slab piping) or the sound of water running needs prompt, professional attention.

- 4. Grab some food coloring**

Toilets can account for up to 30 percent of your water use, so you should check to ensure they're running properly. To test for leaks, add a few drops of food coloring to your toilet tank and wait 10 minutes. If the color shows up in your bowl, then you have a leak allowing water to flow from the tank to your drain without ever flushing the bowl.

- 5. Check exterior usage**

Leaks don't just happen inside the home -- they occur outside as well. Check your outside spigots by attaching a garden hose; if water seeps through the connection while the hose is running, replace the rubber hose gasket and check to see all connections are tight. Consider calling a professional once a year to check your irrigation system if you have one. A system with even a small leak could be wasting 6,300 gallons of water per month.

6. Use common sense

Make a practice of regularly checking in the back of cabinets and under basins for any signs of mold or foul smells that might indicate a leak: prompt attention could save you thousands in repairs. Consider having a professional plumber make an annual inspection of your home to check for leaks or potential problems.

Be especially vigilant if your home is over 25 years old; your plumbing system may be on the declining side of its life expectancy. Inspect all accessible connections at the water heater, pumps, washing machine hoses and valves for oxidation or discoloration – clear signs of a slow leak.

If you suspect a leak anywhere in your plumbing system, call in a professional to make a repair as soon as possible. Don't wait until it gets worse and you end up with a real mess on your hands!



Check the Pressure Relief Valve on the hot water tank. Sometimes these valves are plumbed directly into a drain and may be leaking without your knowledge. If you can't remove the drain pipe to check for a leak listen for a hissing sound, it may be leaking.^[1]



Check the toilet for leaks by removing the top off the tank and listening very closely. If you hear any hissing at all, try to locate where it is coming from.^[2] If you locate the area where the leak is coming from, assess it and determine if you can **fix it**. If you can't, then call a plumber.

- If nothing is noticeable, add some **food coloring** and put a couple of drops in the tank (not the bowl). Wait several minutes and if you have coloring in the bowl, you have a leak in the flapper at the bottom of the tank that is allowing water to seep through.^[3] At this point you can assess if you want to do the repair yourself, or call a plumber.
- If you have more toilets, go ahead and repeat the process with each toilet to make sure you don't have more than one problem.



1. **Try to locate a leak by the house.** This will require you to locate all the hose-bibs (hose-bibs are the pipes that you hook your hoses to, in case you were unsure!). Usually an average

residence has one hose-bib in the front and one in the back, but be sure to find every one that you have and listen carefully.^[5]



Check the garden.^[6] Look at hoses, taps, and drip irrigation systems.



Check the shower head for leaks.^[7] It should be a fairly straightforward home repair if this is a source of leaking.^[8]