

Finding and fixing leaks can help save big on your water bill

Did you know that less than 1% of the earth's water is readily available for human use? With harmful algae and other water quality concerns regularly in the news, combined with the ever-increasing cost of treating and delivering water to your tap, it's important to make the most of every gallon.

In the coming months, we'll share a few small adjustments you might want to consider in your home, to help you save big on your water usage. For those who have already taken steps to reduce their consumption, leaks especially silent leaks, that can easily go unnoticed for weeks or months, may be the issue. That is where we will focus in this article.

Some leaks are easy to detect. Puddles on the floor, stains on the ceiling and the telltale drip, drip, drip are familiar signs. But what about other leaks?

Nearly 90% of unexplained high-usage issues involve sneaky toilet problems. Checking them is easy and you can fix them yourself for about the cost of a cup of coffee.

Use these steps to find the most common toilet leaks:

1. Remove the lid on the toilet tank behind the bowl.
2. Add a few drops of food coloring to the water in the tank.
3. Wait about an hour, without flushing the toilet.
4. If any of the color from the tank appears in the bowl, you have a leak.

Fixing toilet leaks is almost as easy. Sometimes the chain that connects the handle lever to the rubber flapper at the bottom of the tank needs to be adjusted. A chain that is too long or too short can keep the flapper from sealing. More commonly, the flapper or shut-off valve in the tank needs to be replaced. You can buy universal replacements for both, at any hardware store. It's not uncommon for flappers to need replacement every few years.

If the toilet test didn't shine a spotlight on your water-robber, Conduct a whole-house water audit. You can identify even the most sneaky water-robbers overnight by making a note of the numbers on your water meter before you go to bed at night and checking them again first thing in the morning. (Just make sure everyone in the house understands not to use any water until you have done your morning meter check.) If the numbers have changed while you slept, you have a leak somewhere in the house and you can begin to track it down on your own or with the help of a plumber.

This is also a good time for a reminder. It's important that everyone old enough to be left in the house alone should know where your whole-house water shut-off valve is *and* how to use it. Broken pipes not only waste water, but they can quickly do hundreds, even thousands of dollars of damage if the water continues to flow.