

FINDING AND FIXING LEAKS AROUND YOUR HOME

Leaky faucets, toilet and irrigation systems can waste thousands of gallons of water each month. Finding leaks, however, can be a challenging task.

One of the easiest ways to detect leaks is to observe your water meter. To check for leaks, turn off all faucets (including your ice maker). Record the meter reading or mark the needle position with a pencil or piece of tape. Keep the water off. Wait at least 15 to 30 minutes (some leaks have a cycle).

Reread the meter gauge to determine if any water has been used. If you detect a leak, likely culprits are faucets, toilets, and irrigation systems. The hints on this page should help you find and fix leaks before they become big water and money wasters.



FAUCETS

Most leaks result from worn washers in household faucets and showerheads. Faucet leaks are usually caused by worn washers or “O” rings (for washerless faucets). To repair your faucet, all you have to do is turn off the water supply line to that faucet, replace the washer and turn on the line again. If you’re not a do-it-yourselfer, have the work done by someone who knows how to do the job.

TOILETS

To determine if your toilet is leaking, look at the toilet bowl after the tank has stopped filling. If the water is still running into the bowl, or if you hear water running, your toilet is leaking.

Most toilet leaks occur at the overflow pipe or at the plunger ball inside the tank. To locate a toilet leak, take the tank lid off and flush. The water level should come up to about a half inch or so below the overflow pipe. Adjust the float level control screw, if necessary, so the valve shuts off the water at that level. If the valve itself is leaking, you may need a plumber to fix it.

Although you may not see or hear water running, your toilet may have a silent leak. To test for a silent leak, drop a dye tablet or a little food coloring into the tank. DO NOT FLUSH. Wait for about 20 minutes. If coloring appears in the toilet bowl, your toilet has a silent leak. It is probably located in or around the plunger ball or flapper valve at the bottom of the tank. These leaks are also easy to fix with parts from your local hardware store.

IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

There are a number of ways to determine if your irrigation system is leaking.

- Taller, greener vegetation or moss growing around the sprinkler heads are signs of a damaged or dirty valve. Clean grit from valves and replace worn gaskets or seals.
- Wet spots, mud, and eroding soil may indicate a broken pipe or riser. Dry spots in your lawn could also be a sign that a sprinkler is damaged. To locate the source of the leak, you’ll need to dig around the sprinkler. Wet spots or muddy areas around valves point to a loose connection or aging washers.
- Wet spots on pavement also indicate possible leaks. Watch your sprinklers in action to determine which one is showering the pavement. Then turn off the water and check the sprinkler head and riser. Sprinkler spouting geysers of water indicate broken sprinkler heads. Replace them.

OTHER POSSIBLE CULPRITS

A warm or hot spot on your floor, combined with an increase in your natural gas bill, could indicate a broken hot water pipe in the concrete slab beneath your home. If this is the case, you will probably need to call a plumber to reroute the pipes. Check outside taps for leaking water, particularly during the summer watering season. A hose mistakenly left dribbling away in the grass or garden can waste thousands of gallons of water over the course of the summer.