

Residential Water Use

How often do you think about your water? Safe, reliable water for all your household needs is pumped to your home, 24/7. All you need to do is turn on the tap.

An average household of four uses about 360 gallons (1,514 litres) of water a day. Of this amount, 42% is typically used indoors and the remaining 58% outdoors. The largest use of indoor water is for toilet flushing—about 20 gallons/person/day (76 litres/person/day).

A lot of water is wasted because of leaky pipes, joints, and fixtures. A dripping faucet that fills an 8-ounce (237-milliliter) container in less than 30 minutes can waste as much as 1,225 gal. (4,637 L) each year. Every connection point has the potential to leak, particularly if pipes or fixtures are old or exposed to freezing temperatures, or if fixtures have worn washers and seals.

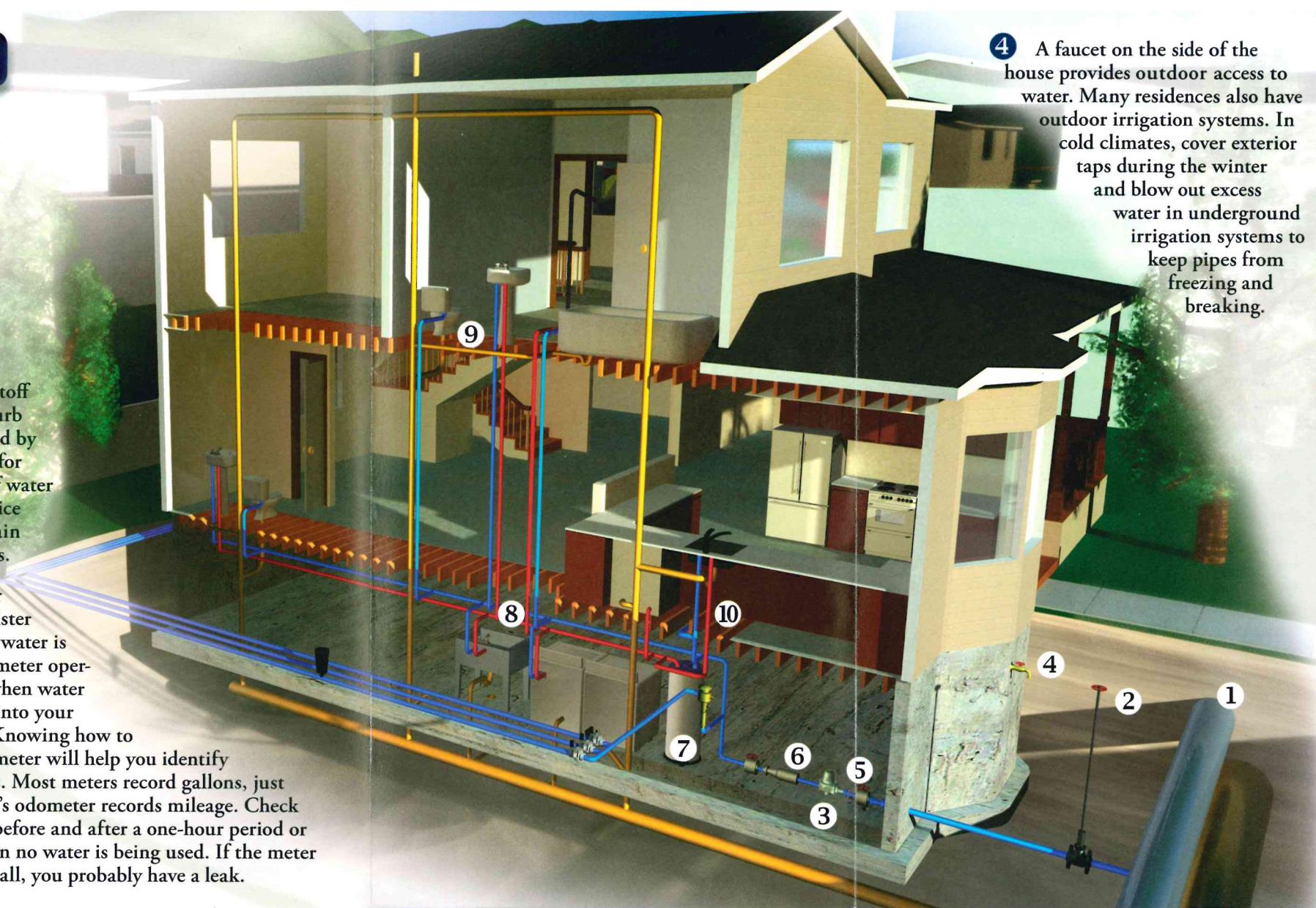
Water is a precious resource. You pay for the water that comes out of your taps, whether that water is used or wasted. So understanding how your plumbing works and identifying and fixing leaks will help save water and money.

1 A service line carries water from the utility's pipes to your home. Homeowners are often responsible for maintaining the service line, which can be affected by age, deep-rooted trees, weather, and soil conditions. An area in your lawn that is constantly wet may indicate a broken water service or wastewater line.

2 A shutoff valve, or curb stop, is used by the utility for turning off water to the service line for main line repairs.

3 Water meters register how much water is used. The meter operates only when water is flowing into your property. Knowing how to read your meter will help you identify water leaks. Most meters record gallons, just as your car's odometer records mileage. Check the meter before and after a one-hour period or longer when no water is being used. If the meter changes at all, you probably have a leak.

4 A faucet on the side of the house provides outdoor access to water. Many residences also have outdoor irrigation systems. In cold climates, cover exterior taps during the winter and blow out excess water in underground irrigation systems to keep pipes from freezing and breaking.



5 The master valve is typically located on the inside wall where the water supply enters your home or near the hot water heater or clothes washer. To determine if you've found it, turn the valve off and see if that shuts off all faucets. Mark the master valve with something distinctive, such as brightly colored paint or tape, so you can find it easily in an emergency.

6 Some homes and many businesses have backflow-prevention devices to stop back-siphonage of wastewater into the potable water system. Back-siphonage can occur when pressure drops during water main breaks or cleaning operations, or when water is released through a hydrant for firefighting. Outside backflow-prevention devices can freeze in cold weather if not properly insulated.

7 Dripping water from the hot water heater doesn't always mean a leak. It may be condensation on the cold water pipe filling the tank. Leaks may occur if the pipes and fittings don't connect tightly to the heater. Check the drain valve, which may need tightening or replacing. Contact a plumber if water is leaking from or near the temperature pressure-release valve, gas unit vent, or heating element gasket. If the tank is corroded, replace the water heater. Most tanks last 7 to 10 years.

Tip: Invest in an insulated heater wrap to cut down on energy use, and don't set the water temperature higher than 130°F (54.4°C).

8 Water is plumbed to faucets, showerheads, and toilets, as well as to the clothes washer, dishwasher, and sometimes the refrigerator. A leaky faucet probably needs a new washer. An Internet search will turn up step-by-step directions for fixing leaky faucets. Remove and clean your aerator at the same time. Save even more water by running the dishwasher and clothes washer only when full, or if possible, adjust the controls to accommodate smaller loads.

9 Check for leaks in the toilet by placing a few drops of food coloring in the tank. If colored water appears in the bowl without flushing, you probably have a leak at the plunger ball, a worn flapper, or the mechanism is out of alignment. These are easily fixed with replacement parts from a hardware store.

10 If you hear water running when no faucets are open, follow the sound to see if you can track down the source. It could be from a leaky pipe in the wall or under the floor. Sagging ceilings or unexplained mold growth could also signal hidden leaks.

Check all faucets in your house once or twice a year. Install water-saving appliances, showerheads, faucets, and toilets to further reduce water use. Saving water by repairing leaks and using water wisely is just common sense. You will conserve water and reduce the risk of damage from leaking and pooling water, save the energy needed to treat and pump it, and save money!



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