

Plumbing Maintenance Tips by John. C. Flood Inc.

Drains

Place a strainer over kitchen and bathroom drains if they do not already have one; this will prevent hair, pieces of soap and other debris from clogging drains. Clean the strainer as needed. Unclog a drain mechanically rather than chemically when possible.

Use Chemical drain cleaner sparingly, especially if your pipes or traps are brass, steel, or cast-iron; some chemicals may corrode metal pipes. Try instead: Pour a cup of baking soda followed by a cup of vinegar down your drain every month.

The drain in shower and in bathroom sink typically needs extra care; pour two of three gallons of boiling water down each bathroom drain about once a month to clear out hair and greasy particles. Every week or two remove sink and tub pop-up stoppers and rinse them off. Every three or four months remove the overflow plate on the tub. Then pull off the pop-up assembly to reach the spring or rocker arm. Remove accumulated hair and rinse thoroughly.

If your shower drain is plugged up: Try a plunger first. If the plunger doesn't unplug the drain, insert a plunger's helper (Snake) down the drain.

Prevent drain clogs by putting a lint trap on your washing machine discharge hose.

Disposals

It is best to use cold water, not hot water when you run your disposal. Let the cold water run as long as the motor is running and be sure to avoid overloading the disposal.

Corn husks, artichokes, onion skins, celery, and other high fiber material can clog your disposal. Do not pour fats and cooking oils into your sink. Solid fats can solidify in cold drain pipes, trap food particles, and clog the drain. Do not put coffee grounds down the drain.

If your disposal is clogged, turn off the motor and the water. Reach under the sink and insert the service wrench the came with your disposal or a ¼ inch Allen wrench into the hole at the bottom of the disposal. Turn it back and forth until it can turn freely in complete circles. Then use turns to remove whatever cause the disposal to jam. Finally, press red reset button on the bottom of your disposal in case the disposal needs to be rest.

Food particles which remain in your disposal can cause odors. Put a combination of ice cubes and lemon peels in the disposal, run it for about thirty seconds, and then run cold water through the disposal. Disposal cleaner and degreaser can help you too.

Faucets

Replace or repair a leaky faucet promptly. Be sure to check under sinks for moisture or leaks. Even a small leak can waste as much as 15 to 20 gallon of water a day not only wastes water; it can eventually ruin your faucet or even cabinets and floors.

Leaky faucets are ordinarily caused by seals which are dirty or worn. You may either clean or repair the worn parts, or you may want to install a new faucet.

Frozen Pipes

Don't let your outdoor faucets freeze up in the winter. Unattached garden hoses before freezing temperatures arrive in fall. Then close the shut-off valve on the pipes which lead to your outdoor faucet. Then open the outdoor faucets so that any residual water can drain.

If you are indoors faucets sometimes freeze in very cold water: Try leaving the cabinet doors under the faucets open so that they get a little bit more heat.

In extreme cases let the water trickle very slowly into the sink. Insulated water pipes which may be exposed to freezing temperatures or wind. Water pipes which are not being used should be drain for the winter in areas where there may be severely cold weather. If there's plumbing in your garage, be sure to keep your garage door closed when it is very cold. Pipes in unheated garages or basement should be insulated.

If your pipes do freeze:

Turn off the water at the main shut-off valve so that you don't have problems as the ice melts

Leave the faucets on the relieve pressure as the ice melts

Use a blow dryer or heat gun to thaw frozen pipes

Do not even think about using a blow torch! It's too dangerous

Hoses

Don't leave hot water in kitchen or shower hoses. The hoses will last longer if you run cold water through them after using hot water.

Prevent drain clogs by butting a lint trap on your washing machine discharge hoses.

Put new washers in all your hoses twice a year.

High Water Bills

There are several ways to find out if water bills are higher than they need to be. Check faucets for dripping water. Fix a leaky faucet promptly. Be sure to check under sink for moisture or leaks.

Periodically check your toilet for leaks: Place a few drops of food coloring in the tank, not the bowl. A couple of tablespoons of instant coffee or Kool-Aid will work too. Check the toilet after about thirty minutes. If the water in the bowl has some of the color in it, the tank is leaking and the stopper and valve seat may need to be replaced.

Check for underground leaks or undetected leaks in the home: Turn off the main water valve inside your home and then go outside and check your water meter. If it is still turning you may have an underground leak.

Alternatively, write down the numbers on your water meter at the beginning of a period when your home is going to be unoccupied for a few hours. Check the meter when you return; if the numbers have changes, there may be a leak inside the home.