5 Things Only Plumbers Know (But Won't Tell You)

There are things that savvy homeowners can do themselves that will improve their plumbing and keep from having to call a plumber as often. Plumbers have their own secrets of the trade, so consider some things you should know about your plumbing that they might not tell you.

Protect Your Pipes

Protecting your pipes is the key to preventing [costly water leaks](https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-fix-your-leaking-ceiling-4138353). A water leak not only causes property damage, but it can also drive up your water bill. Start by knowing what to look for when a pipe is leaking. It is not always obvious.

Pipes often leak near joints, so watch for:

* Wet spots on the floor
* Water spots on the ceiling
* [Mildew on walls, carpets and flooring](https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-get-rid-of-mold-4163846)
* Sagging floorboards
* Damp ground around the house

You might also notice a change in the water pressure or a sudden increase in your bill. Keep the area under the sink clear so you can spot drips and leaks there, too.

The best way to prevent leaks is to take steps to protect the pipes.

Wrap Them With Insulation

You can buy [foam tubes](https://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/skills-and-know-how/plumbing/10-things-you-must-know-plumbing-leaks) that are easy to install and that will keep pipes warm during the winter.

Turn on Outdoor Faucets Before a Freeze

Open exterior faucets to keep the water flowing and prevent freezing if you go on vacation during the winter or are expecting a [freezing night](https://www.thespruce.com/preventing-and-thawing-frozen-water-pipe-1824905).

Remove Hoses

[Detach hoses](https://www.thespruce.com/winterize-outside-faucets-2718702) from outdoor faucets during the cold season. Left connected, the water in the tube can freeze and damage the faucet and pipes.

Make sure to close any interior valves that control the outdoor faucets, too. Once closed, drain the water from the faucets.

Take Care of Your Sump Pump

Without the [sump pump](https://www.thespruce.com/sump-pump-maintenance-for-the-home-4125779), the interior of the house can flood and that will lead to mold growth. There are things you can do to ensure the sump pump works.

* Clean out the inlet screen every 3 months
* Check to make sure the pump is plugged in often
* Test the sump pump every few months. Pour water into the pump basin until the float rises and make sure the pump starts

If you do need to replace the sump pump, don’t settle on the cheapest model. It’s worth spending a little extra to get a quality pump.

Educate Your Family About the Toilet

The best way to avoid [a clog](https://www.thespruce.com/toilet-problem-toilet-clogged-4109509) is to make sure everyone knows what can and [what can’t go down the toilet bowl](https://www.thespruce.com/common-items-you-should-never-flush-4150503). Make a list of do-not-flush items including:

* Feminine hygiene products—even if they say flushable, don’t flush them!
* Paper towels
* Toys of all sizes
* Cotton balls
* Ashtray debris
* Cooking grease

If you have little children or pets who get curious about the toilet, consider installing a lid lock to keep them from flushing the wrong things down the bowl.

Caring for the Water Heater

If your water heater is over [8 to 12 years old](https://www.lowes.com/projects/repair-and-maintain/when-to-replace-a-water-heater/project), it’s [time for a new one](https://www.thespruce.com/household-items-to-replace-4174855). If the one you have isn’t operating efficiently, it costs you money.

A little maintenance goes a long way with water heaters, too. Start by draining it at least once a year to remove sediment from the bottom. Other water heater tips include:

* Keep the temperature to around 120 degrees. For every 10 degrees higher you set it, expect to pay [five percent](https://www.thisoldhouse.com/how-to/how-to-maintain-water-heater) more in [energy costs](https://www.thespruce.com/reduce-your-home-energy-cost-1824739).
* Insulate the pipes going into the water heater with foam tubing.
* Test the pressure relief valve by lifting the handle and letting it snap back down. You should see a burst of steam come out if the valve is working correctly.

If you do decide it’s time for a new one, look at some of the modern designs like a tankless heater. They work more efficiently and require fewer repairs.

When You Do Need to Hire a Plumber

There are some projects that simply [require a licensed professional](https://www.thespruce.com/when-to-call-a-plumber-4145066). When you need a plumber, look for someone that has been in business for at least five years. Check out sites like [Angie’s List](https://www.angieslist.com/) and [HomeAdvisor](https://www.homeadvisor.com/) to find licensed electricians near you. Additionally, [you should](https://www.thespruce.com/tips-for-hiring-a-contractor-4156976):

* Get a few quotes
* Check the plumber’s license and insurance
* Find out if the plumber charges for travel time
* Ask about special costs like cutting into walls
* Check to see if the plumber offers a guarantee on both the work and the parts

The things you do around the house matters when it comes to plumbing. The more you DIY, the less of your money goes to the plumber.

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