

Leaky Toilets Waste Many Gallons

Q: My water bills are too high. On a quiet night, I can hear water running continuously in my toilet. Could this cause my high water bills? Can I repair it inexpensively myself? - D.D.

A: An estimated 20 percent of the toilets in the U.S. are leaky. Each leaky toilet can waste thousands of gallons of water per year.

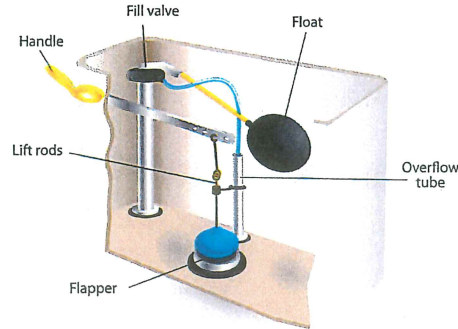
You should periodically test your toilet for leaks, which are often so quiet that most people have no idea that their toilets are leaking.

For \$10 to \$20 for parts, you can easily repair a leaky toilet. Even if your toilet is not now leaking, you may want to install a new, low-flow valve or dual-flush kit in order to save an additional \$50 to \$100 per month.

The leaking sound you hear could be from several common causes: The float ball arm is dragging; the flush valve (flapper in the bottom of the tank) is leaking; the refill (ballcock) valve is leaking; the tank water level is too high; any combination of these causes.

Lift the tank lid off and check the height of the water level. It should be about 3/4-inch below the top of the overflow tube. If it is higher than that, bend the float ball arm downward a little. Make sure the arm is not dragging on the overflow tube and is free to float up and shut off the refill valve.

Put several drops of food coloring in the tank and wait 15 minutes. If you see the color in the bowl, the flush valve is leaky. Before replacing it, try cleaning sediment or hard water deposits off the valve seat and flapper.



Another simple test is to turn off the toilet inlet water valve on the wall. Mark the level of the water on the inside of the tank. If the water level drops in one hour, it is leaking.

If the flush valve checks out OK, the refill valve may not be shutting off completely when the float arm comes up. This allows the tank level to rise slowly over the overflow tube. Wait several minutes after flushing the toilet. Gently lift up on the float arm, if the leaking sound stops, the refill valve is faulty. Using just an adjustable wrench and pliers, you can replace the refill valve unit.