50 Home Plumbing Tips You Need to Know

Part 1: Ongoing, Preventative Plumbing Care

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1. Preventative home plumbing care starts with **you**. You should self-inspect your plumbing system for obvious signs of wear and other performance issues once each month.

2. Beyond self-inspection, we strongly recommend having a professional look at your plumbing system once per year, as well. A trained eye will be able to catch warning signs you may be unaware of, and help you tackle plumbing projects before issues worsen.

3. Know where your home's sewer valve is located. When major problems occur, you can limit the effect of things like flooding by accessing and closing the valve. This information also helps when hiring a professional plumber to service your home.

4. Be smart with your kitchen's garbage disposal unit! Things like animal bones, cooking oils and starchy food products can take their toll on your unit, and cause a range of later problems. Also, process ice cubes in your disposal unit to sharpen the blades every so often.

5. What applies to garbage disposals also applies to toilets and tub drains. Things like "flushable" wet wipes, hygiene products and even hair can result in troublesome drain clogs in short time. "Flushable" wipes cost cities across America millions of dollars every year in sewer line damage.

6. Keep an eye out for the warning signs of pipe and water fixture leaks. This includes lush patches on lawns, spikes in your monthly water bill, poor water flow and drain backup.

7. Generally, steer clear of commercial cleaning products. While they work in a pinch, overuse can actually do significant damage to inner pipe walls, resulting in more expensive repairs. Instead, consider using simple hot water flushes and baking soda/vinegar solutions to the same effect.

8. Paper products like towels and napkins are the most commonly flushed non-flushable products, and account for roughly 47% of all non-flushable materials found in sewer clogs. Flushing these products contributes to a growing, nationwide problem - don't be part of that problem.

9. Make sure your pipes are insulated to protect them from freezing during winter months. Plastic insulation is easy to install for exposed pipe lines throughout your home, garage or walls.

10. If you still have a traditional water heater in your home, drain and flush the unit once per year to prevent internal buildup, and extend its life and performance.

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Part 2: Dealing With Common Plumbing Problems

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11 DIY: For minor drain clogs, one effective first-step you can try is simply plunging the drain with a standard rubber plunger. For sink clogs, special sink plungers perform particularly well. Note: be sure to cover overflow vents when plunging!

12 DIY: For stubborn drain clogs, you can snake your own pipes entirely using professional-grade drain augers, which can be found at most home improvement retailers. DIY drain snaking is the perfect solution for persistent, troublesome clogs that flushing and plunging do not eliminate.

13 DIY: Clearing plumbing traps is another DIY project you can take on to improve the performance of your home drains. For clogs within these traps, removing the trap and manually dislodging debris is surprisingly simple.

14 DIY: Carbonated, acidic sodas can also be used to eliminate gunk and clogged drain debris within pipes. The dissolving agents in these products naturally break down residual materials in a much safer manner than commercial cleaning products.

15 DIY: Keep your DIY plumbing toolbox well-equipped. Taking on projects with the wrong tools is a recipe for disaster. Keep basin wrenches, pipe wrenches, files, hex-wrenches and a large bucket on-hand when tackling any DIY plumbing project.

16 Professional: For major bathroom and kitchen remodeling, reaching out to a trained plumbing professional is strongly advised. One misstep could cause significant damage to your home plumbing system, and wind up costing you thousands more than the initial project.

17 Professional: Whatever your residential plumbing problem is, have a professional inspection completed first, before signing on a service provider. Know how much your repairs should cost, and make smarter decisions based on that insight.

18 Professional: If at all possible, supplement professional plumbers with a layout of your home's irrigation system and pipe configurations prior to any renovation task. This can help avoid accidental damage or faulty installations due to blind error.

19 Professional: When seeking out plumbing services, there are a number of things you should consider, such as licensing, warranty agreements and pricing options. Flat rates for plumbing services are typically a more sound than hourly rates, which can fluctuate due to unforeseen circumstances and result in much higher costs.

20 Professional: The most important tip we could possibly give you about professional plumbing repair is this... don't wait until the last minute, or brush problems off when they arise, no matter how minor they may seem.

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Part 3: Installing New Plumbing Fixtures

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21 First and foremost, when the time comes to replace an existing or degrading plumbing fixture, do so. Pushing replacement off until a more convenient time may put your plumbing system at unnecessary risk.

22 Tankless hot water heaters deliver the precise amount of hot water needed, when it's needed. This eliminates water heater waste by as much as 20% each month - reduced consumption that translates into meaningful savings after long-term use.

23 Installing shock absorbers along pipe lines limits vibration, and the annoying, banging noises that come with it.

24 A simple, WaterSense-labeled faucet aerator can save as much as 200 gallons of water throughout the fixture's lifetime. Installing aerators is not just incredibly simple - it's an easy way to save on water consumption and cost in the long-term.

25 When renovating bathrooms or kitchens, wait to reinstall electrical lines until after all plumbing renovations are complete. For the best installation, you may have to reframe your walls - a process severely complicated by utility and electrical lines.

26 Consider upgrading your existing or dated plumbing fixtures with high-efficiency WaterSense-labeled models. This applies to toilets, shower heads and faucets; virtually every water fixture in your home can be updated with a conservative, eco-friendly alternative.

27 Even if installing a new fixture, such as a faucet or sink drain, looks simple, stick with the manufacturer's instructions step-by-step. Some of the most common plumbing problems are the direct result of careless installation.

28 When replacing home water lines, consider switching from copper pipes or other metal materials, and instead installing PVC plastic pipes. Not only are these pipes easier to work with, but they also withstand corrosive elements.

29 Applying expanding foam between kitchen sink basins can greatly reduce the echo effect of some sink models. The foam, in this case, stops vibrations caused by water pouring into the basin.

30 For major plumbing renovations, you might want to consider a professional consultation first. A little professional advice can go a long way, especially for large-scale DIY projects.

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Part 4: Lowering Water Consumption

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31 Try to deal with running toilet leaks as soon as the problem becomes clear. A running toilet tank can waste hundreds of gallons of water in a single month.

32 Washing dishes by hand wastes much more water than a single dishwasher load of equal volume. Stick with washing dishes in your dishwasher unit, and only running the unit when fully loaded.

33 Monitor and remove weeds on your lawn whenever they spring up, as these nuisance plants siphon water and nutrients from grass and other plants in your yard. When many homeowners try to deal with or avoid troublesome weed growth, they'll find themselves overwatering their lawns (compensating for the stolen water and nutrients) to no avail.

34 Consider having your irrigation system equipped with a rain sensor. Running sprinklers during rainy seasons is one of the easiest high-consumption practices to avoid.

35 Collect rinse and waste water, as well as dirty ice cubes, and use this to water plants inside and outside of your home. Every ounce of water helps!

36 Recirculating pumps in pools, ponds and other artificial water fixtures can greatly reduce unnecessary water consumption.

37 For a family of four, replacing existing faucets with WaterSense models can help save as much as 877 gallons of water per year.

38 This one requires a little professional help, but consider routing greywater (leftover water from washing machines, tubs and sinks) to your home's irrigation system. There's no reason to let gallons upon gallons of useful water go to waste.

39 After mowing your lawn, consider leaving the layer of clippings in place. Lawn clippings help lawns retain water and moisture, especially during the summer months. As a result, you'll find yourself watering your lawn less than you would had you picked up the clippings.

40 For average family-size households, turning off the faucet during teeth brushing could result in as much as 3,000 gallons of water saved over the course of one year.

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Part 5: Residential Pipe Repair

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41 When it comes to broken pipe lines, there are a number of approaches homeowners can take - the best one in each case is entirely circumstantial. Things like pipe depth, location and the type/extent of damage are all factors to consider when selecting a repair option.

42 For shallow, damaged pipes (within 2 feet of the surface) that do not run beneath surface-level objects (driveways, sidewalks, etc.), manually digging and replacing the pipe will often be the most affordable solution.

43 The first step in having your pipes repaired should always be a professional video inspection. This can help you understand the scope and extent of damage to your pipes, and give some insight into the most effective repair method for the job at hand.

44 When damaged pipes run beneath landscaping objects or deep below ground-level, trenchless technologies provide an affordable alternative to dig-and-replace repairs. Trenchless methods cut extensive labor and lawn renovation out of the equation - saving homeowners thousands of dollars on otherwise complicated repairs.

45 Hydro-jetting is an affordable clog-clearing solution for clogged pipe lines. Highly pressurized water jets dislodge and push away clogged debris from within your pipes, in a one-time, non-invasive process.

46 Traditional repairs in complex situations can cost as much as $25,000 for a single project. Lining, on the other hand, typically costs between $4,000 and $20,000 depending on the application and scope.

47 One thing homeowners often overlook when looking into pipe repair options is the location of various utility lines on their property, which may run parallel to water lines. If this is the case, some applications, like pipe bursting, will be ruled out.

48 Try to keep a detailed mapping of your underground pipe lines and utilities on file. This will help trenchless repair specialists identify the best repair solution for your home.

49 When planting new trees or adding landscaping features to your property, be wary of where underground pipes lie. Planting too close to a pipe line can result in severe root intrusion if you're not careful.

50 Choose local; you should find a professional plumbing service provider that knows your region, and the common problems homeowners face that may be unique to your area.