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How to put a stop to water leaks

By

Many parts of the country are in a drought, and water is precious. That's one great reason to fix leaks. Of course, severe water leaks can cause a lot of damage, so let's talk about how to best handle water leaks, big or small.

The very first thing you need to know how to do is shut off the water supply to your home. If you have access to the water meter, you should have a cut off valve on your side of the meter to enable you to do that. In some cases, it may require a special tool or "key" to do so. Some homes will have a main shut-off somewhere else between the meter and the house. If you cannot locate your shut-off, talk to your utility company for some advice. Test it, and make sure it works!

Many appliances and fixtures also have shut-off valves. Check under sinks and behind toilets for valves, and test them to make sure they work.

The next step is to repair the leak. Obviously you want to make a complete repair but, sometimes, you have to make do with what you have on hand.

Epoxy putty is a great way to fix a small water leak. It's two claylike components that are mixed together to form a putty that can be molded around leaks and, once set up, is pretty waterproof.

Tape made to work in wet situations also can temporarily fix a leak. Check auto- and pool-supply stores for a variety of sizes, and buy some to keep on hand.

Round clamps also can come in handy. If you can wrap the leaky area with rubber first, then put a clamp on the area, you usually can stop the leak. Worm gear clamps are easily tightened and won't damage the pipe. If you are fresh out of clamps, grab some cable ties to use instead.

When it comes to cleaning up a wet area, disposable baby diapers are great for soaking up liquids. Just throw one on top of the leak and let it do its thing.

Newspapers also can be used to absorb liquids and can be thrown away when full.

For larger leaks, a wet/dry shop vacuum can take care of the mess.

Just keep these things in mind and have a few supplies available, and you can handle these little "issues" when they happen to you.

Recycle in the shop

Plastic jugs go into the recycling bin at most homes these days. But recycling bins like these are great sources for lots of great organizing ideas and shop aids to us. Heavy-duty jugs, like the kind that most laundry detergent comes in, with sturdy handles can be cut a couple of different ways to become great places to store a wide variety of things in. Cut off part of the top, leaving the base and the handle, to create a sort-of bucket that you

can fill with stuff. The handles make it easy to pick up and carry. You can cut off more of the top if you just want a "bowl" to store things in.

Rope ends that unravel

Nylon rope is super for outdoor fun and projects. It won't mold or rot and lasts for a long time, unlike a lot of natural-fiber products. You'll see it in lots of sizes and colors. The only problem area with this material usually is at the ends, which can unravel if not knotted. You also can secure them by melting the ends together. Just hold the end over a lighter and melt the fibers together. This will prevent the rope from unraveling.

Super hints

ÿ Soaker hoses are great for watering your garden, flower beds and even your home's concrete foundation. They don't waste water so you can use them during a drought, and they are made of recycled materials like old rubber tires.

ÿ Fill the top of the soil with rocks when you keep potted plants on your patio. This is a good way to prevent squirrels and rats from digging in your pots. I started doing this when I noticed the squirrels were digging up my bulbs. The rocks worked better than anything else I tried.

ÿ It might sound funny, but we watched the next-door neighbor clean out his convertible with his leaf blower. We had to ask why, but he showed us. The small, battery-charged blower would get all of the leaves and other light debris out of the car's interior so he could detail the rest.

Q. We have a long driveway and chose railroad ties to line it because they were cheap and easy to come by. The problem that we have is that they move or get knocked around. What can we use that's inexpensive to hold them better in place?

A. Use short sections of rebar to hold them. Just drill holes, one near each end, and drive the rods through the ties and into the ground to hold them in place. This is easy and very inexpensive, maybe even free if you can find a builder who is trashing old rebar.

Q. I've been looking at buying a freezer for more food storage but will need to put it into my garage. The garage is sealed up well but not insulated. Is it still OK to put a freezer out there?

A. Inside the home, even in a basement, would be more energy-efficient. But if you buy one that is insulated properly, it should be fine. Make a point to check on it periodically, to ensure it keeps running. If it is on a garage power circuit, it might trip the GFCI safety outlet, which could mean it shuts off when you are not expecting it to. We speak from experience on this one.

Q. I have water running down the inside of my fireplace chimney. How can I pinpoint the leak?

A. Start at the top and work your way down, looking as you go. You might even have one person standing down below while you use a flashlight and a garden hose in random places until you locate the leak. Make sure you use caulk patching compound made for high temperatures.

Reader tips

ÿ My daughter asked me to cut an old door for her to use as a desktop in her apartment. The door was solid wood but, when I started to cut it, the cut was rough and splintering the edges. I put a piece of masking tape over the cut line and started again. This stopped the splinters and I was able to get a nice cut that barely needed any sanding. I did paint the edge to match the rest of the door. It was a great idea for a cheap desktop.

ÿ Our apartment has a little patio/deck off the family room. We have kids and a small dog and needed to put up some better protection than the railings around the deck. We found some white netting at the sporting-goods store and attached it over the railings with cable ties. It's super tough and doesn't even look bad. Since it's some sort of outdoor net, it should last through storms and rain too.

ÿ We have a lot of framed art in our front hallway. I have noticed a problem that when you look down the hall, you see the tops of the pictures sticking out. I prefer for them to be flatter against the wall. I got some push pins

from my office and pushed one behind the two bottom corners of each frame to hold the bottoms out to match better with the tops. I'm not sure they look that much better to other people, but they sure look better to me.

ÿ We have to put all of our garbage in bags, which are picked up once a week. I keep three metal garbage cans in the back of the house to hold the bags and keep the critters out. It's usually all it takes for a week's worth of bags at our house. One way I keep the cans from falling, or being knocked over, is to tie them together with bungees. When the cans are all together, they are very stable and I never have problems with them falling over.

ÿ I use plastic containers that seal really well in my kitchen to keep food fresh longer. I think it works so great that I've started using them for storing other things like paint, too. They do seem to work and the lids usually are easier to take off. Just make sure you label the containers — and you probably shouldn't use them in the kitchen anymore.

Shoptalk

ÿ Oftentimes, replacing parts is going to be much less expensive than replacing a whole appliance. But, unless your unit is fairly new, it's going to be hard to find "aftermarket" parts — unless you go to our favorite source, RepairClinic.com. Just this morning, we replaced the door on one of our microwave ovens for a fraction of the cost of a replacement. As an added bonus, we were able to do so without removing it from the over-the-stove mounting. We ordered the part on Monday, and it was here three days later and installed on day four. RepairClinic.com also has a lot of information on maintenance, a super Q&A department, live chat and helpful people you can call at (800) 269-2609.

ÿ In most shops you'll find at least one pair of safety glasses. But what about ear protection? Most people just don't think about it or have ear protection around. 3M's Tekk Protection safety glasses have built-in reusable earplugs attached to the glasses by means of a lanyard, which makes them handy even if you forget them. The glasses have a sleek, wraparound frame, anti-scratch coating on the lens, which is also wraparound, and impact-resistant lenses that absorb 99.9 percent of UV rays. You can find out more at www.3m.com and you can buy a set at most hardware stores and home centers.

ÿ Write to Al and Kelly Carrell in care of the Daily Herald, P.O. Box 280, Arlington Heights, IL 60006 or visit the Carrells' website at thesuperhandyman.com.

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