

ENVIRONMENTAL WELLNESS GUIDE

Know What's in Your Water

A simple guide to checking your tap water and choosing a filter that fits your household

START HERE Choose a water filter based on what is actually in your water—not on a product's marketing. Different technologies reduce different contaminants.

Check your water in four steps

1. **Search the EWG Tap Water Database.** Enter your ZIP code or water utility name. Confirm that you selected the utility that actually serves your address; one community may have more than one supplier.
2. **Read the results carefully.** Write down the contaminants detected, the utility's reported level, the legal limit, and any EWG health guideline. An EWG health guideline is not the same as an enforceable legal limit, and a detection does not by itself establish an immediate health emergency.
3. **Confirm with your annual water report.** Review your utility's Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) for the water source, regulated contaminants, violations, and current contact information. Community water systems must provide this report each year.
4. **Decide whether home testing is needed.** Utility data describe the public water system, not every home's plumbing. Testing may be useful for concerns such as lead service lines or fixtures, a change in taste, odor, or color, or a private well. Use a state-certified drinking-water laboratory.

Open the database: [EWG Tap Water Database](#)

PRIVATE WELL The EWG utility database is not a substitute for testing your well. EPA recommends annual testing for total coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH, plus other contaminants suggested by local conditions.

Mail-in testing option: [National Testing Laboratories \(WaterCheck\)](#). Confirm state certification and local testing requirements before ordering.

Match the filter to the contaminant

A certification mark alone is not enough. Verify that the exact brand and model is certified for the specific contaminant-reduction claim you need. Two filters that look alike may have very different claims.

Concern	Look for	Important note
Chlorine, taste, or odor	NSF/ANSI 42 claim; often activated carbon	Standard 42 addresses aesthetic effects. Confirm chlorine or chloramine specifically, because claims differ.
Lead	NSF/ANSI 53 lead-reduction claim; some NSF/ANSI 58 RO systems	Confirm the exact model and replace cartridges on schedule. Consider testing if your service line or household plumbing may contain lead.
PFOA/PFOS (PFAS)	A certified PFOA/PFOS reduction claim	Certified options may include carbon or reverse osmosis systems. Do not assume every carbon filter reduces PFAS.
VOCs or TTHMs	NSF/ANSI 53 VOC-reduction claim	Point-of-use filtration treats drinking and cooking water. Ask a qualified professional whether a whole-house approach is appropriate for a specific volatile contaminant.
Nitrate/nitrite, fluoride, or perchlorate	NSF/ANSI 58 RO system with the exact reduction claim	Not every RO system carries every optional claim. Check the certified product listing, not only the box.
Arsenic or chromium	A certified claim for the specific contaminant and form	Water chemistry and incoming concentration matter. Use laboratory results and qualified treatment guidance.
Bacteria or other microbes	Treatment designed and certified for the organism or risk	Especially for private wells: test first and address the well source. UV or disinfection may be part of a professional treatment plan.

Certification guide: [NSF Contaminant Reduction Claims](#)

Choose the right setup

- Point-of-use: Treats water at one location, such as a pitcher, faucet, countertop, refrigerator, or under-sink system. Often practical for drinking and cooking water.
- Point-of-entry or whole-house: Treats water as it enters the home. It costs more and should be selected and installed with qualified guidance when the concern affects water throughout the home.
- Activated carbon: Common for chlorine, taste, odor, and some chemical claims. Its performance depends on the exact certification and cartridge life.
- Reverse osmosis: Can address a broader set of dissolved contaminants when the model carries the needed NSF/ANSI 58 claims. Consider water use, installation, maintenance, and whether remineralization matters to you.
- Water softener: Treats hardness minerals; it is not a general-purpose contaminant filter.

BUDGET WISELY Compare the total cost—not only the purchase price. Include replacement cartridges, membranes, installation, water use, and the number of gallons treated before replacement.

Before you purchase

- ☐ I confirmed my water source and correct utility.
- ☐ I reviewed both the EWG results and the most recent utility report.
- ☐ I wrote down the specific contaminants I want to reduce.
- ☐ I verified the exact model's independent certification and reduction claims.
- ☐ I checked capacity, flow rate, installation needs, and replacement cost.
- ☐ I know how often to replace the cartridge or membrane.
- ☐ If I use a private well or have a serious concern, I obtained appropriate laboratory or public-health guidance.

Important reminders

BOILING IS NOT CHEMICAL FILTRATION Boiling can kill many disease-causing microorganisms during an emergency, but it does not remove lead, heavy metals, salts, or most other chemicals. Always follow instructions from your water utility or public-health authority during an advisory.

- Replace filters on schedule. An overdue cartridge may lose effectiveness, and poorly maintained carbon filters can support bacterial growth.
- Use cold tap water for drinking and cooking when lead is a concern; heating or boiling does not remove lead.
- A TDS reading does not identify every contaminant. Select treatment from actual test data and certified claims.
- Contact your utility promptly about sudden changes in color, odor, or taste. For a private well, arrange testing.

My water snapshot and next step

Water source and utility/well: *Public utility / private well*

EWG data period and most recent CCR year:

Top contaminants or concerns:

This week I will:

The contaminant(s) I want a filter to reduce:

Filter model(s) I will verify:

Replacement schedule and estimated annual cost:

Trusted resources

- **EWG Tap Water Database** — Search by ZIP code or water utility.
- **EPA Consumer Confidence Reports** — Find and understand your utility's annual water-quality report.
- **EPA Private Well Guidance** — Review testing and treatment guidance for household wells.
- **National Testing Laboratories (WaterCheck)** — Optional mail-in well testing; verify state certification and local requirements before ordering.
- **NSF Certified Water Treatment Products** — Search exact brands and models by contaminant-reduction claim.

Whole-person wellness, rooted in Christ.

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