

Computersmarts

■ **Your e-mail account may not have been compromised**, even if friends tell you that they have received spam from your address. Spammers can “spoof” your address, meaning that your e-mail address appears as the return address, even though it was sent from someone else’s (the spammer’s) account. However, if you are concerned that someone may have accessed your account, change your password and notify your e-mail provider’s customer service. A representative may be able to investigate the matter further to make sure that no one is accessing your e-mail account.

■ **Turn off “autocomplete” on your Internet browser** for more security. Most modern browsers are able to remember what you type into forms—passwords for Web sites, credit card information, your address, etc. This can save time when logging into a site or making a purchase, but it can cause problems if your computer is stolen or someone else uses it. Disabling this feature differs from browser to browser. Search the “Help” file on your browser for instructions.

■ **Personal Web profile.** Create a site all about you without having to know all the intricacies of Web page development. At <http://BusinessCard2.com> or <http://chi.mp>, you can create a free account and then create your site. You can use the site to tell people about your interests, job and other activities. You also can link the site to your social networks (Facebook, Twitter), recent photos or videos, blog posts, etc....and you can post ways for people to get in touch with you. The sites enable you to make great electronic business cards and signatures for e-mails.

Research editor David Boyer is *Bottom Line/Personal*’s resident computer guru, but even Dave says there’s always more to learn.



If you have a computer question or a tip you would like to pass along, e-mail it to Dave@BottomLinePersonal.com. If we publish your tip, we’ll send you a *Bottom Line/Personal* T-shirt.

INSIDE INFO



What Most Plumbers Won’t Tell You, But This One Will

Simple fixes for drips...clogs...running toilets...more

Terry Love

We don’t think much about our plumbing until something goes wrong—but when it does go wrong, it can turn our lives upside down. Leaks can cause thousands of dollars’ worth of water damage and/or mold problems that are not covered by insurance.

Many costly plumbing problems can be prevented if home owners take some simple preventive steps. And some plumbing problems are well within the abilities of the average home owner to repair on his/her own.

How to keep your plumbing running right and your money in your pocket...

PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Preventive maintenance moves that are worth making...

■ **Replace the hoses connecting your washing machine to your home’s water supply.** These hoses endure significant stress each time your washer starts or stops. They sometimes burst, flooding laundry rooms, even though they showed no prior outward signs of damage. *Best:* Replace the hoses every 10 years, even if they still look fine. Braided stainless steel replacement hoses are somewhat more dependable than rubber ones. Expect to spend \$10 to \$20 per hose. Another option is hoses made by FloodChek (800-845-9089, www.FloodChek.com), which are super-durable and come with a 20-year warranty. *Cost:* \$40 to \$58 for a set of two.

Helpful: Shut off the water to the washing machine before removing the old hoses, and drain any water remaining in those hoses into a bucket. Once you’ve attached the new hoses, turn the

water back on, and watch for leaks at both ends of the hose to make sure that the connections are tight before pushing the machine back against the wall.

■ **Check for small puddles under your water heater.** Even tiny leaks from water heaters can signal that full-blown failure is just days or weeks away. If you spot leaking water and the water heater is at least 10 years old, buy a new water heater as soon as possible, and clear everything of value from the area so that it won’t be damaged if the current water heater gives out before it’s replaced. If yours is less than 10 years old, consider calling a plumber for a repair. Be aware, though, that a repair might cost \$250 to \$500 and a replacement water heater may not cost much more than that.

■ **Watch for leaks when you turn on external faucets for the first time each spring.** Ice might have caused cracks in the pipes leading to these faucets during the winter. Such leaks can occur inside the home, so head down to your basement or crawl space, and check the pipes leading to your external faucets where they exit the home.

To reduce the odds of this ice damage in future years, shut off the water to external faucets before the first freeze, then open these faucets and disconnect any hoses. If your home does not have shut-off valves for its external faucets, buy Styrofoam faucet covers (available ▶

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Terry Love, owner of Love Plumbing & Remodel in Bellevue and Bothell, Washington. He has been a plumber since 1974 and runs a popular Internet forum on plumbing issues at www.TerryLove.com.



▶▶ in home centers for around \$5 apiece). These provide some insulation for faucets exposed to winter weather.

■ **Watch for unexplained water use.** If you have access to your water meter, periodically turn off all taps and water-using appliances, and then see if your meter continues turning. Monitor water bills for sudden increases, too.

The most common problem is a running toilet. It doesn't just inflate water bills—it could flood your home if the toilet clogs. (See below for strategies for fixing running toilets.) Do not assume you will hear it running. Running toilets sometimes are virtually inaudible.

DO-IT-YOURSELF SOLUTIONS

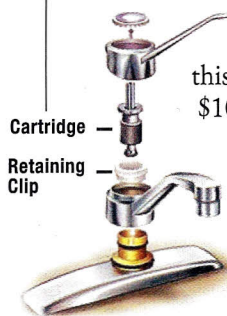
Home owners don't need to pay a plumber to solve these problems...

■ **Dripping faucets.** Most modern kitchen and bathroom faucets are what's known as "cartridge faucets." To stop a drip, simply replace the cartridge, which regulates water flow.

You might not even have to purchase this replacement. Many major brands now offer lifetime guarantees and supply new cartridges for free to home owners who call their customer service phone numbers. If your faucets don't have this coverage, expect to pay \$10 to \$25 or more.

To replace a cartridge, shut the valves below the sink to turn off the water to the faucet, then turn the faucet on to relieve any remaining water pressure. If there's a decorative cap

on top of the faucet handle (or handles, if this is a two-handle faucet), unscrew it or (depending on the faucet model) gently pry it off. Remove the screw holding the handle in place, then remove the handle. This should provide access to the top of the cartridge, a cylindrical part usually made of brass or plastic. There's likely a locking nut or retaining clip holding the cartridge in place. Remove this, then remove the old cartridge. Insert the replacement, and put the faucet back together. If your faucet does not



Standard cartridge faucet

conform to the steps described above, search the manufacturer's Web site for specific directions.

Some bathrooms and kitchens have older faucet styles, which fall into a few categories. You have a "Delta-style" faucet if the handle feels like it's rotating backward slightly—not moving straight up—when the water is turned on. You have a *compression two-handle faucet* if it feels like additional force must be applied to turn the water flow off completely. Drips in these styles of faucets often are simple to fix, too, but the parts and processes are different. Check the manufacturer's site for repair directions, or use Google.com or YouTube.com to search for directions.

Virtually all compression faucets and most Delta-style faucets now are decades old. Drips and leaks start to become common in faucets of this age, so replacing these might make the most sense.

■ **Running toilets.** When a toilet won't stop running, it usually means that the flapper—that plastic or rubber piece in the tank that's lifted up by a chain when the

toilet is flushed —is no longer sealing properly. Remove the tank's lid, and use a stick to gently push down on the flapper. If the toilet stops running, you've identified the problem. Turn off the water to the toilet, flush to drain the tank, remove the flapper and take it to a home center to find a new one of the same size and shape. Chlorine is the culprit in most flapper failure, so it's worth a few dollars extra for a flapper made from advanced materials designed to stand up to the chlorine in tap water. Chlorine-resistant models often are red, not black.

If the flapper isn't the problem, the toilet's fill valve likely is. New fill valves cost less than \$20 and are easy to install. Select a reliable fill valve brand, such as Fluidmaster or Korky, and follow the installation directions that come with it. Don't worry if the new fill valve looks different from the one that it's replacing—"float ball" fill valves have been replaced by "float cup" fill valves in recent



years, but they serve the same purpose. Standard fill valves, available in any home center or hardware store, will fit most modern toilets, though some replacement fill valves are specifically designed for certain one-piece toilets.

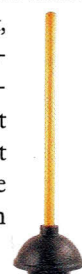
■ **Clogged toilets and drains.** Most home owners buy the wrong plunger, use it incorrectly, then wonder why they have trouble clearing clogs. Instead of the traditional red dome plunger, select one with a fold-out black rubber flange that, when extended, reduces the diameter of the plunger's mouth to approximately two inches so that it forms a tighter seal with the toilet bowl opening. The insert can be left tucked in when dealing with a clogged sink or tub drains.

Home owners often use too much force with a plunger. Strenuous plunging is likely to break the plunger's seal with the toilet or drain, reducing suction. Instead, position the plunger in the toilet or over the drain, and help it create a seal by vibrating it in and out a few times by just a half inch or so. Then gently pull the plunger up to remove the clog.

■ **Helpful:** A closet auger (also called a toilet auger), which has a flexible cable and a crank handle to maneuver the cable, is another good tool for clearing clogs, but augers sold in home centers often have 7/8-inch-wide heads—so small that they pass right through clogs without moving them. Select an auger with a head approximately 1 3/4 inches in width at a plumbing-supply store.

■ **Low flow from a faucet or showerhead.** This often is caused by sediment buildup. Remove the showerhead or faucet's aerator—the aerator is the small screen screwed into the end of the faucet. If this requires the use of a wrench, apply a few layers of masking tape or duct tape to the faucet or showerhead to reduce the odds that you'll scratch the finish. Clean the aerator or showerhead with an old toothbrush, and soak it in white vinegar if necessary. If the aerator won't come clean, buy a replacement.

■ **Smart:** Shut the sink's drain before removing the aerator so that small parts won't be lost. ■ ■



Plunger with flange

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