



How to Replace a Leaking Toilet Flapper

Toilets are one of the great conveniences of modern civilization. However, remember that the water used to flush your toilet is drinking water, just like the water that comes out of your tap or showerhead. It's a valuable and limited resource and shouldn't be wasted. Checking your toilets for leaks is an easy way to protect the environment and manage your utility bills and should be done at least annually.

The flapper is the device in the toilet tank that drains fresh water from the toilet tank through the bowl to flush out the waste. As it ages, the flapper will begin to leak water from the tank to the bowl wasting thousands of gallons per year (which you pay for)! Fortunately, it's easy to check your toilet for leaks and make repairs. First, carefully remove the lid from the toilet tank and set it aside. Next, place a few drops of food coloring or a dye strip in the water. Wait 15 minutes without flushing. Check the water in the bowl of the toilet. If any dye has leaked into the bowl, the flapper valve is likely worn out and is leaking. Replacing the flapper will solve the problem most of the time.

There are various types of flapper valves, but they all perform the same function—to drain water from the tank to flush out the bowl. Note the general style of flapper and the manufacturer and model of the toilet before you shop for a replacement flapper. It may be helpful to take the old flapper with you to the hardware store, but you'll need to shut off the water to the toilet before doing that (see steps 1 through 3 below).

Follow these steps to replace your flapper. To take the old flapper with you to purchase the replacement – follow steps 1 through 3.

1. Before beginning any plumbing project, it's always a good idea to locate the main water shut off to the home just in case there's a problem. If you haven't already done so, shut off the water supply to the toilet. The shut off valve is usually located on the left side of the toilet coming out of the wall a few inches above the floor. Be very careful when you turn this valve as it may not turn easily and can break if too much pressure is applied. If the valve won't turn, you should consider contacting a plumber before proceeding.

Water for today...
and tomorrow

2. After the water to the toilet is shut off, flush and hold the flapper open to drain all the water from the tank. You can soak up any remaining water in the tank with a sponge or towel. Remove the old flapper (most clip on; no tools are required to remove) and get the bottom of the tank as dry as possible.
3. Depending on the type of flapper, the valve seat (the place where the flapper sits to form a seal) may need to be replaced. Some repair kits now offer a simple peel-and-stick replacement. Whatever the design, you want to make sure the valve seat is clean and smooth. A valve seat that is uneven or has buildup will not allow for a good seal, even with a new flapper. Attach the new flapper to its hinge point and attach the chain to the flush handle arm. Make sure the flapper lifts and drops into place smoothly. You may need to adjust the length of the chain connecting the flapper to the flush arm handle to be sure your flapper lifts sufficiently to drain the tank and then seals completely when it drops.
4. Turn on the water supply to the toilet. Observe the tank as it fills and notice if the flapper seems to be holding a seal. Give it one practice flush and, if all is well, replace the toilet tank lid.

Congratulations on completing this important repair! If the toilet does not perform correctly or you have other problems, you are advised to contact a licensed and bonded plumber. By perusing the Internet and typing "toilet repair" in search engines, you can find numerous Web sites that have photos and videos showing you how to complete this project. Thanks for your efforts to conserve and protect our valuable water supply.



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