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Fixing that leaky faucet

The toughest part of fixing a leaking faucet is getting to the job, but you shouldn't put it off. Only one drop a second will waste a shameful amount of water — 2,300 gallons a year. And the repairs after a year of leaking will be no easier than when the leak is first noticed.

The tools needed for the faucet work are a large adjustable wrench, flatblade screwdriver, Phillips screwdriver and pliers. If the faucet is a tub-shower faucet, you may need a set of special socket wrenches that cost about \$10. These reach behind the wall to remove the packing nuts so you can remove the valve stems.

The first step is to turn off the water supply. If you're fixing just one side, hot or cold, of a dual-handle faucet and the fixture has handy shutoff valves beneath it, you need to turn off only the side to be worked on. Lacking under-fixture shutoffs, you'll have to turn off the branch water supplies or the main house supply.

To remove the faucet handle, loosen the Phillips head screw that holds it to the stem. Sometimes this screw is located beneath a decorative trim cap in the center of the handle. The cap either unscrews or can be snapped off

by prying with a putty knife. Handles lift or are pried off of the upper end of the stem. If you have old faucets and they are badly corroded, you may want to replace them. Also it may be advisable to replace the entire faucet assembly. As you identify the parts in the following description, keep this alternative in mind.

Directly below the handle is the packing nut. Remove this nut to reveal the stem and any old packing around the stem.

Remove any old packing from around the stem and examine the stem. If it shows areas that are badly rusted or corroded, replace it if possible. The seat washer is probably the source of the leak or the drip. Check it for a flattened appearance or a groove. It may also be ragged and brittle from old age. Replace this washer whether it appears to be in good shape or not. It is secured with a screw. If the screw is rusty, replace it with a brass screw.

It is not easy to tell much about a faucet seat by looking at it. For best results and to avoid having to repeat this whole procedure soon, replace it too. Be sure to get one of the same size and shape as the old one.

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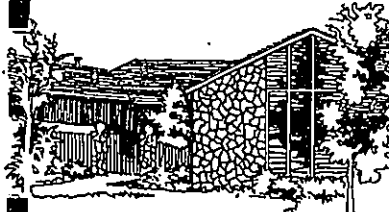


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