

Leaks and leak fixing

- taps

A leaking or dripping tap can waste between 30 and 60 litres of water a day. That is approximately 1 500 litres a month. Fixing leaking or dripping taps is simple and can be done at home. Water Wise assists you with an easy DIY solution to unnecessary water loss and high water bills.

An unusually high water bill may indicate a leak in your home or garden. Water leaks can be very costly and a waste of South Africa's most precious natural resource. Common types of leaks found in the home include faulty toilet washers, dripping taps, and other leaking valves. Up to 10% of households have leaks. Fixing a dripping tap is a simple way to prevent water wastage as a result of leaks and can be done by anyone at home. Water Wise has compiled a simple system of detecting leaks and fixing problem taps.

Leak-fixing: where to start

A dripping tap can be very frustrating, as well as costly. If you find yourself having to close a tap tighter and tighter with no effect on the dripping, it is most probably a worn washer that needs replacing. Firstly, it is very important to turn the water off to the house. Always close the water mains before attempting to fix a leak. Read the Water Wise article "Leaks and leak fixing: meters and mains" to find out more about the water mains. You will also need the following:

- pliers with adjustable jaws
- a vice grip
- a shifting spanner of the correct size
- a screw driver.

DIY: changing a washer

It is very easy to fix a leaking tap, by simply changing the worn washer or seal (Fig 1). This is how:

- Firstly, turn off the main water valve or stopcock. Once this is done, open the tap to relieve the pressure and to empty the tap of any remaining water.
- Remember to put the plugs in the bath or basin of the tap you are repairing so that you do not lose any small screws down the drain.
- Dismantle the tap and remove the worn washer. This is done by unscrewing the tap head.
- Unscrew the bell-shaped cover and remove.
- Lay the parts down in the same order you remove them to simplify reassembly.
- Unscrew the head part with water pump pliers, or a similar tool, and remove.
- Unscrew the washer retaining nut and remove the faulty tap washer.
- Replace with a new washer of the same size, thickness and type.
- Replace the nut. Remember not to over-tighten the nut as this may damage the new washer.

- Re-install the spindle and screw down the cover.
- Close the tap.
- Restore the water supply and check again for leaks.

If your tap is still dripping even once the washer has been replaced, there is a chance it may need to be reseated. Reseating is often required because of grit present in the tap, or general wear-and-tear. You will need to call a plumber to reseat your tap for you so that it is sealed correctly with the proper tool.

Also, if you find that you are constantly repairing a leaking tap, it may mean that the tap itself is worn and needs replacing. Some taps cannot be disassembled, which means the entire tap will need to be replaced. Certain modern taps come with soft rubber washers that can be easily damaged if too much force is used when closing the tap.

If you are uncertain as to how to repair a leaking tap, or if a repaired tap continues to leak, consider consulting a plumber.

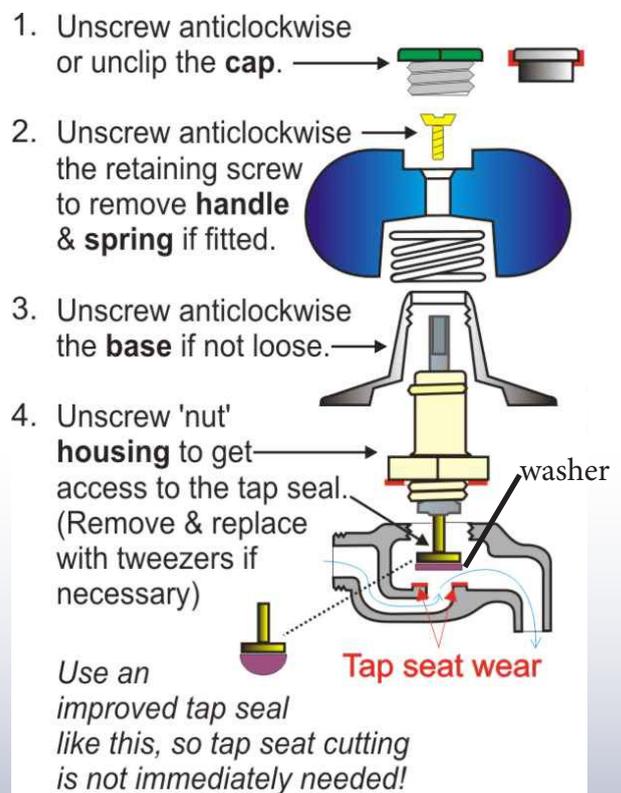


Fig 1. Disassembling a tap to fix a faulty washer, or in this case, a seal.