

How to Fix a Running Toilet

FREE DIY GUIDE

Introduction

A running toilet can waste hundreds of gallons of water per day, significantly increasing your water bill. Most running toilet problems can be fixed in less than an hour with basic tools and inexpensive parts.

Tools and Materials

- Adjustable wrench
- Screwdriver
- Replacement flapper
- Replacement fill valve (if needed)
- Scissors
- Towels or rags

Step 1: Diagnose the Problem

Remove the tank lid and perform a dye test:\n\n1. Add a few drops of food coloring to the tank water\n2. Wait 15-30 minutes without flushing\n3. If colored water appears in the bowl, you have a leak\n\nThe most common causes are a worn flapper, incorrect float height, or a faulty fill valve.

Fix 1: Replace the Flapper

The flapper is the rubber seal at the bottom of the tank that controls water flow into the bowl. Over time, it deteriorates and no longer seals properly.

Step 1:

Turn off the water supply to the toilet.

Step 2:

Flush to empty the tank.

Step 3:

Unhook the old flapper from the flush valve.

Step 4:

Disconnect the chain from the flush lever.

Step 5:

Take the old flapper to a hardware store to find an exact match.

Step 6:

Install the new flapper by hooking it onto the flush valve ears.

Step 7:

Attach the chain to the flush lever with about 1/2 inch of slack.

Step 8:

Turn the water back on and test.

TIP:

If the chain is too long, it can get caught under the flapper. If it is too short, the flapper will not seal. Adjust for about 1/2 inch of slack.

Fix 2: Adjust the Float

If the water level in the tank is too high, it will continuously flow into the overflow tube.

Step 1:

Check the water level. It should be about 1 inch below the top of the overflow tube.

Step 2:

For a float ball: Bend the float arm downward slightly to lower the water level.

Step 3:

For a float cup: Pinch the adjustment clip and slide the float down the fill valve shaft.

Step 4:

Flush and observe the water level.

Step 5:

Adjust until the water stops about 1 inch below the overflow tube.

Fix 3: Replace the Fill Valve

If adjusting the float does not work, the fill valve itself may be faulty.

Step 1:

Turn off the water supply.

Step 2:

Flush to empty the tank.

Step 3:

Disconnect the water supply line from the bottom of the tank.

Step 4:

Unscrew the locknut holding the fill valve in place.

Step 5:

Remove the old fill valve.

Step 6:

Install the new fill valve according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Step 7:

Reconnect the water supply line.

Step 8:

Turn the water back on and adjust the float to the proper level.

Fix 4: Check the Flush Lever and Chain

Sometimes the problem is as simple as a tangled or broken chain.

Step 1:

Check that the chain is not tangled.

Step 2:

Ensure the chain has about 1/2 inch of slack.

Step 3:

If the chain is broken, replace it.

Step 4:

Make sure the flush lever moves freely and returns to its resting position.

Prevention Tips

- Avoid using drop-in tank cleaners that can damage rubber parts\n- Do not use excessive force when flushing\n- Inspect toilet components annually\n- Replace flappers every 3-5 years as preventive maintenance

When to Call a Professional

Contact a plumber if:

- The toilet continues to run after you have tried all fixes
- There is a crack in the tank or bowl
- Water is leaking from the base of the toilet
- The flush valve is damaged
- You are uncomfortable making the repairs yourself

A professional plumber can quickly identify and fix the problem, and can also check for other issues that might not be immediately obvious.