

Filter your options to improve tap water quality

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Now that the first water bills have been sent out and with news that as many as 200,000 households are affected with lead contamination, the quality of the product we are paying for comes more sharply into focus. I've just installed a tap filter as the water had a distinct smell of chlorine. The difference in the taste of the water is remarkable.

The trouble with tap water is that you don't know what you are drinking. Chlorine at least has a smell but there are a whole host of other substances, such as lead as well as pesticides and herbicides, not meant for human consumption that are not easily detected.

Unlike jug filters, under-the-sink water filters fit under the countertop and filter tap water of impurities on demand.

These are relatively inexpensive and easy to install. They deliver clean, pure water at home, without the need for bottled water, which is great for the environment too.

When it comes to selecting a filter there are a few options available. The one I purchased is made from ceramic and carbon. When you use your tap, cold water is diverted through the filter cartridge, removing a wide range of possible contaminants including lead and other heavy metals.

The cartridge's ceramic outer shell traps dirt, sediment and some types of harmful bacteria.

Meanwhile, the cartridge's inner core of carbon tackles unpleasant odours and tastes – for instance, chlorine. The filter is compact so it doesn't take up too much space underneath the sink.

This filtration system comes with a separate counter-top tap. It's small and discrete, and easy to install. The filters trap the impurities and provide clean drinking water.

Another option is a reverse osmosis filter. These are slightly more expensive than the carbon and ceramic filters. They operate by using a membrane to remove contaminants from water and are usually paired with a separate charcoal filter to remove chlorine. These filters require a holding tank so you will need to sacrifice more space under your sink than you would with the carbon and ceramic filter.

Not all reverse osmosis systems are the same. Some will reintroduce the minerals lost through purification and others will not.

Also they use one to three litres of water for every one litre of pure water produced, so there is some waste. And finally, there are filters that will ionize and alkalise the water as well as purifying it. There are under-counter options that work using electrolysis and others which do not use electricity. Again these kinds of filters will take up more space under your sink and are the most costly of the three.

The price of a water filter varies depending on the kind of system you choose. On average they start at about €200 plus installation. The filters will need to be changed roughly every six months so it's worth selecting a reputable brand to ensure that you will be able to keep getting replacement filters.

Different water filters will remove different types of contamination, so for those planning to tackle lead contamination in drinking water, make sure you check to see that the filter right for requirements.

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