



Warming up to tap water

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Bottled water no longer has the cachet it once did, now that consumers understand the negative environmental effect of its processing and packaging. In fact, choosing tap water over bottled is au courant, especially among those who want to make green purchases.

In most of Canada, including Toronto, that's a safe move – water is tested during and after treatment to ensure it's free of bacteria. Richard Girard, research co-ordinator at the Polaris Institute, which launched [Inside the Bottle](#), a campaign to educate consumers about the bottled water industry, is heartened by the trend toward tap. Choosing it over bottled water will "save people money and is a much more environmentally friendly choice."



The Clear20 can go directly from fridge to table.

Having said that, Girard concedes some consumers are concerned about chlorine or fluoride in their water, or don't like the odour of their tap water. In rural areas that rely on well water, contaminants, and unusual tastes and smells may be even more of a concern. To deal with those issues, he hopes consumers will choose water filter systems over bottled water.

"We support tap water, but for people who have concerns, a filter system will be cheaper and more environmentally friendly than bottled water," he says.

There are basically three types of water filter systems for home use: pitchers with filters, faucet attachments (either bottom or faucet mounted) and highly sophisticated whole-house systems that treat all the water that flows through the home.

Pitchers are an easy, low-tech way to filter tap water and keep water cold in the fridge, rather than letting it run until cold at the tap, which increases water usage. Some filtration will occur naturally; Girard says even leaving an open pitcher of water in the fridge will allow chlorine to evaporate. But an open vessel will also usually pick up odours from other foods.

[Design Within Reach](#) has a beautiful glass pitcher that filters water with louseki stones from Kanazawa on the Japanese coast and Binchotan high-grade charcoal – also from Japan – that lasts up to six months. Pretty enough to go from fridge to table, the Water Pitcher sells for \$85, and comes with one set of charcoal sticks and stones. Additional filter sets cost about \$25.

Clear2O is another new water pitcher with a filter that goes right from the fridge to the table. It uses compressed carbon, which reduces chlorine taste and odour, lead, cysts and certain volatile organic chemicals. It's hard plastic and has a slim profile that makes it easy to tuck into a corner of the fridge.

The Clear2O has a threaded knob attached to a tube that fits neatly into the handle of the unit. To fill it, the unit is placed beside the sink. Then the knob is lifted out of the handle and attached to the faucet, allowing tap water to flow into the unit. The unit is available at Canadian Tire for about \$30. Replacement filters cost about \$10.

Faucet-mounted filter systems are an increasingly popular option, according to Abby Buford, a spokesperson for [Lowe's Canada](#), which also sells whole-home systems.

"It's a very convenient alternative to bottled water," she says of the faucet-mounted system. "There are no plumbing connections, so it's also really easy to install."

Lowe's sells a PUR vertical mount in white (\$25) or chrome (\$40). A light indicator lets the user know when it's time to change the filter, which sells for about \$16.

The GE Homespring system purifies water for the entire home through a membrane system that was originally designed and developed in Oakville. Used in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and in tsunami-ravaged areas in India and Sri Lanka to provide safe drinking water, the system removes bacteria, cysts and viruses.

Lory Jackson, product manager of Forefront Homespring, which distributes the system in Ontario, says it will appeal to urban homeowners who don't like the taste and smell of their water, or who are concerned about chemical additives. Also, he says the product will interest those living in rural areas who want to ensure well water tastes good and is safe to consume. For more information, go to www.yourwater.ca.

Since early last summer, Homespring has been in place at [Grano restaurant](#), where owner Roberto Martello has been offering customers the filtered water as "T.eau." He also uses the water with an in-house carbonator to make sparkling water and says the response has been tremendous.

"People think it's great, and I've even heard little kids tell their moms how much they love the water."

The downside? The new system has put a dent in Martello's bottled water sales, an effect he shrugs off.

"Hey," he says, "sometimes community comes first."

Vicky Sanderson's Hot Home Products appears every Saturday. Email her at vswriter@sympatico.ca.