

Food When The *Shops Stop*

RESILIENCE · PREPAREDNESS · PRACTICAL NUMBERS

Water Resilience

A practical guide for UK preppers

Storage · Treatment · Transport · Rainwater

Finding springs and streams on OS maps

Plus a dedicated section for urban dwellers

Free guide for r/UKPreppers

Version 1.0 · October 2026

From the free Grow Your Own Food calculator

www.foodwhentheshopsstop.com

Contents

Contents	2
Why water comes first	3
1. How much water do you need?	3
2. Storage	4
3. Treatment and sterilisation	6
4. Rainwater harvesting	8
5. Finding springs and streams on OS maps	9
6. Legal and practical	11
7. Transport	12
8. Urban dwellers: a different plan	13
9. Checklists and budget tiers	14
10. A real-world example: a village with two springs	15
Sources and further reading	16

How to use this guide

Read sections 1 to 3 first: they cover how much water you need, how to store it and how to make it safe. Sections 4 to 7 deal with finding, collecting and moving water. **Section 8 is written specifically for urban dwellers**, and section 9 gives checklists and budget tiers. Section 10 is a real-world example of a hillside village with two springs. Every dose and contact time here is a typical figure. **Always follow the label on your own tablets, filter or bleach.**

Why water comes first

People can last weeks without food but only days without safe water. Water is also the preparedness job that is easiest to start today: it costs very little, needs no skills and takes up only a corner of a cupboard.

In the UK, the mains supply is reliable most of the time, which is exactly why so few households have a plan for the day it is not. Burst mains, freeze-thaw damage, treatment-works failures, power cuts that stop pumping stations, and contamination events that lead to boil notices all happen regularly, and some leave thousands of homes without water or with water they should not drink.

There is a useful official benchmark. Under the rules Ofwat describes, when supply is interrupted a water company must provide replacement water of at least **10 litres per person per day** within the first 24 hours, using bottled water, bowsers or standpipes. That is a sensible minimum to plan around, and also a reminder that the first 24 hours are on you.

The three questions this guide answers

1. **How much** water do I need, and where do I keep it?
2. **How do I make** questionable water safe to drink, and how do I know my method actually works?
3. **Where do I get more** when my store runs low, and how do I carry it home?

1. How much water do you need?

Plan in layers. A short interruption needs a small store. A long one needs a renewable source and a way to treat it.

Use	Minimum (survival)	Comfortable	Notes
Drinking, including hot drinks	2 to 3 L	3 to 4 L	Higher in hot weather, illness, breastfeeding
Cooking and washing up	1 L	2 to 3 L	Pasta and rice are thirsty; one-pot meals save water
Hygiene: hands, face, teeth	1 to 2 L	3 to 5 L	Handwashing prevents the diarrhoeal illness you cannot afford
Toilet flushing (bucket)	0 (use bag system)	10 L or more	Use grey water, rainwater or stream water, not stored drinking water
Realistic planning figure	about 5 L	10 L	Per person per day, excluding toilet flushing

Remember the extras: pets, baby formula (which must be made with safely boiled water), medical needs, and the extra 50% or so people drink in hot weather or when working hard.

Storage tiers

Tier	Target	Family of 4 (at 5 L each per day)	In practice
1: First 72 hours	15 L per person	60 L	Three 20 L containers, or a few multipacks of bottled water
2: Two weeks	70 L per person	280 L	Fourteen 20 L containers; realistic for houses, tight for flats
3: Longer term	A source, not a store	n/a	A rainwater system, a nearby spring or stream, and treatment you trust

Rule of thumb

Everyone hits tier 1 first, then tier 2 as space and budget allow. Nobody stores months of water in a typical home. That is what tiers 3 and the later sections of this guide are for.

2. Storage

Containers

Container	Good for	Watch out for
Sealed bottled water (2 to 6 L multipacks)	Cheapest and simplest start; use the best-before date as your rotation guide	Bulky; thin plastic punctures; keep out of sun
Stackable food-grade water containers (10 to 20 L)	Best all-rounder for houses and flats; stack neatly, tap or spout fitted	Weight when full; wash and sanitise before first fill
Jerry cans (typically 10 to 20 L, HDPE)	Rugged, easy to carry and load into a car or trolley	Check they are food-grade ; fuel cans must never be reused for water
Collapsible containers (5 to 20 L)	Store flat; good for carrying water from a source	Can puncture; not ideal for long-term storage
Large tanks and IBCs (hundreds of litres)	Rural properties, gardens, outbuildings	Needs food-grade and opaque, or shading; frost; weight; space
Water butts	Rain for garden, flushing, washing	Not drinkable until treated

Setting up a container properly

- Choose **food-grade HDPE** (recycling code 2) or PET (code 1). Avoid old milk cartons, which are hard to clean and degrade.
- Wash with hot soapy water. To sanitise, swish a teaspoon of plain, unperfumed household bleach per litre of water around the inside for about 30 seconds, then rinse well.
- Fill from the kitchen cold tap. UK mains water already contains a residual disinfectant, so stored mains water does not usually need anything added.
- Label every container with the fill date. Fill to near the top, leaving a little room for expansion if it could freeze.
- Store somewhere **cool and dark**. Light grows algae, heat speeds up deterioration, and freezing can split containers.
- Keep water away from fuel, paint, paraffin and solvents: plastic is slightly permeable to vapours.

- Rotate roughly every six months (a good habit: swap them when the clocks change). Smell and taste before use, and treat if in doubt.

Emergency water you already have at home

The moment you hear about a problem, before the pressure drops, fill whatever you can: pans, kettles, the bath, buckets and sinks. After that, know your hidden sources:

Source	Use it for	Important
Bath (filled before supply fails)	Flushing and washing; drinking only if clean, covered and treated	Drinking: use within about 24 hours , treated first. Flushing and washing: several days. Cover it. See the box below
Hot water cylinder	Drinking after treatment	Switch off the immersion heater and boiler first , let it cool, then drain from the drain-off point. Boil or filter it
Pipework	Drinking after treatment	Close the main stopcock, open the highest tap to let air in, then drain from the lowest tap
Ice and freezer bottles	Drinking	Freezing sealed bottles of water fills spare freezer space and acts as cold packs in a power cut
Liquid from tinned vegetables and fruit	Cooking, drinking in an emergency	Do not waste it
Toilet cistern (not the bowl)	Flushing, washing	May contain cleaning tablets or old water; not for drinking unless you are certain
Loft cold water tank	Flushing, washing	Often not drinking-quality; check its condition before any use
Central heating system water	Never drink it	Contains inhibitors and corrosion products

How long is bath water safe?

There is no official time limit. A bath is not a sterile container: it is open to the air, the tap water is warm, and there may be soap or skin residue, so germs can multiply faster than in a sealed, cool container. These are cautious rules of thumb, not guarantees.

To drink: fill a clean bath (scrub and rinse it first, or use a bath-liner bag), keep it covered, and **use it within about 24 hours**. Always filter and boil or disinfect it first. Better still, decant it into clean, lidded containers within a few hours, then treat it as normal stored water.

To flush or wash: fine for several days, until it smells, looks cloudy or grows a film. Then tip it out and refill if you can.

Do not drink it if it is older than a day or two, smells, has scum, or if children or pets have been in it. If you use a bath-liner bag, follow the maker's own storage instructions.

3. Treatment and sterilisation

What you are trying to remove

Hazard	Examples	Dealt with by
Bacteria	E. coli, Campylobacter, Salmonella	Boiling, chemical disinfection, UV, most filters
Protozoa	Giardia, Cryptosporidium	Boiling, filters (0.1 to 0.2 micron), chlorine dioxide with long contact time. Crypto is highly chlorine-resistant
Viruses	Norovirus, hepatitis A	Boiling, chemical disinfection, UV, purifiers rated for viruses. Most hollow-fibre filters do not remove viruses
Leptospira (Weil's disease)	From animal urine in water	Mainly an infection risk from cuts and splashes; avoid wading with open wounds
Algal (cyanobacterial) toxins	Blue-green algae scum	Not removed by boiling; avoid affected water entirely
Chemicals	Nitrates, pesticides, fuel, metals, mine water	Not handled by boiling or tablets; carbon helps taste only. Choose a better source
Sediment and cloudiness	Silt, peat, organic matter	Settle and pre-filter first, otherwise disinfectant is used up and UV is blocked

The pipeline: clarify, filter, disinfect

A **pipeline** simply means doing three jobs in the right order, because each stage does something the others cannot: **clarify** removes the visible dirt (so the next steps work properly), **filter** removes most germs, and **disinfect** kills what is left, including viruses a filter will miss. Skip a stage and you weaken the rest: a clogged filter, or tablets used up on muddy water, will not protect you.

- **Choose the best source you can** (see section 5). The best treatment cannot fully rescue the worst water.
- **Clarify** (strain out the visible muck): let cloudy water settle, then pour it through a cloth, coffee filter or similar.
- **Filter** (remove most germs): pass it through a proper microfilter, if you have one.
- **Disinfect** (kill the rest): boil it or use tablets or bleach. Doing both a filter and a disinfectant gives you two barriers.
- **Store** in a clean, closed container. Colour-code clean and untreated containers so they never get mixed up.

Boiling

At UK altitudes, bring water to a **rolling boil for one minute**, then cool it with a lid on. Water-company boil-notice guidance also says an automatic kettle that clicks off is enough. Boiling kills all biological hazards, but does nothing about chemicals or algal toxins. Its downside is fuel: plan how you will heat water without power, and store the fuel.

Chemical disinfection

Method	Typical dose	Contact time	Covers	Notes
Chlorine dioxide tablets (e.g. Micropur-type)	Per label, commonly 1 tablet per litre	About 30 min; manufacturers quote up to 4 hours for Crypto	Bacteria, viruses, Giardia, Crypto (with long contact)	Works in cloudier water than chlorine; long shelf life when kept dry
Chlorine (NaDCC) tablets (e.g. Aquatabs-type)	Pick the tablet strength for your volume; follow the label	About 30 min; longer in cold or cloudy water	Bacteria, viruses, Giardia	Poor against Crypto; very compact and cheap
Plain household bleach (sodium hypochlorite only)	Roughly 2 to 3 drops per litre for 4 to 6% bleach; check the % on the label	30 min; double the dose for cloudy water	Bacteria, viruses, Giardia	Never use scented, gel, thick or 'splash-less' bleaches. Water should smell faintly of chlorine afterwards

Cold and cloudy water

Chemical treatment works more slowly in cold water. In winter, double the contact time or treat indoors in a warm room. Never rely on a chemical alone for suspicious water: filter first, then disinfect.

Filters and purifiers

Type	Examples	Removes	Be aware
Hollow-fibre microfilter (0.1 micron)	Squeeze, straw and inline types	Bacteria and protozoa	Not viruses. Never let it freeze: a frozen filter can be damaged invisibly. Backflush to clear clogs
Gravity filters	Hanging bag systems; countertop gravity units	Depends on element; check claims	Great for families; check what standards the maker claims, and whether virus removal is tested
Purifier bottles and pump purifiers	Press-type purifier bottles, pump purifiers	Bacteria, protozoa and, in rated models, viruses	More expensive; check test certification
UV-C pens	Battery-powered pens	All biological hazards, if water is clear	Needs batteries and clear water; useless on cloudy water
Ceramic filters	Pump and countertop ceramic	Bacteria and protozoa	Cleanable; fragile; slow

Solar disinfection (SODIS) and other last resorts

The WHO describes filling clear PET bottles and leaving them in bright sun for about six hours (or two days if overcast). In the UK, this is **unreliable and effectively useless from October to March**. Treat it as an emergency backup only.

Testing

Test strips for nitrate, pH or hardness are useful screening tools but cannot prove water is microbiologically safe. For a spring or well you rely on, arrange proper lab testing for coliforms and E. coli (see section 6).

4. Rainwater harvesting

Rain is free, falls on most UK roofs regularly and needs no permission to collect from your own roof for domestic use. It is not safe to drink as collected: it picks up bird droppings, moss, roofing residues and dirt on the way.

How much can you collect?

1 mm of rain on 1 square metre of roof gives about 1 litre. A garden shed roof of 4 m by 3 m (12 square metres) collects roughly 120 litres from 10 mm of rain, minus some losses. The UK average is a little over 1,000 mm per year, varying from under 600 mm in parts of the east to well over 2,000 mm in the western uplands.

Worked example: a terraced house roof

Measure the **footprint** of the roof (width times depth of the house, including overhang), not the sloping surface. A typical two-storey terrace is about 5 m wide and 9 m deep, so about **45 square metres** of roof in total. Usually half drains to the front gutter and half to the back, so a single downpipe sees about **22 square metres**.

Rain for one hour	Rate	Whole roof (45 m ²), realistic	One slope or downpipe (22 m ²)
Light rain	about 1 mm per hour	about 36 L	about 18 L
Medium (moderate) shower	about 2.5 to 7.5 mm per hour	about 90 to 270 L (midpoint about 180 L)	about 45 to 135 L (midpoint about 90 L)
Heavy rain	about 10 mm per hour	about 360 L	about 180 L

The 'realistic' figures assume about 80% of the rain is collected after losses, first flush and overflow. Forecasters define 'moderate' differently (some use lower bands of roughly 0.5 to 4 mm per hour), so treat these as a guide and use a cheap rain gauge to learn what your own showers deliver. For scale: about 180 L from one medium shower would fill a typical 200 L water butt, and is roughly nine days of 5 L per person drinking and basic hygiene for a family of four.

Watch out for flat roofs: cats, foxes and birds

Single-storey flat roofs (extensions, garages, porches, bay and lean-to roofs) are easy for cats to reach, and foxes and birds use them too. Their droppings can carry bacteria and parasites (including Toxoplasma), and rain will wash it straight into your gutter and butt. **Do not collect drinking water from a roof that animals can walk on.** Use it for the garden only, or collect from a high pitched roof that animals cannot reach, and always filter and disinfect anything you plan to drink.

Setting it up

- Use a **diverter or first-flush device** so the dirtiest early rain is discarded.
- Fit a fine mesh at the downpipe and a **lid** on the butt to keep out insects, leaves and light.
- Keep butts in **shade** to slow algae growth.
- Avoid collecting from roofs with lead flashing, asbestos cement, tar or bitumen finishes, or recently treated timber, and from **flat roofs that cats and other animals can reach** (see above).
- In winter, prevent freezing: disconnect the diverter, drain taps, or leave headroom.
- Use butt water for garden, flushing and washing. For drinking: **filter, then boil or chemically disinfect.**

No roof? A clean tarp or groundsheet angled into a bucket collects surprising volumes in a downpour.

5. Finding springs and streams on OS maps

In a long emergency, a known, tested natural source can be the difference between managing and not. The time to find one is now, on a map, followed by a walk in daylight.

Reading the map

- On OS Explorer (1:25,000) maps, look for the text **Spr** (spring) and **W** (well). Older maps also mark pumps, and some springs appear only as a blue line starting in the middle of a field.
- **Place names are clues:** Well, Wells, Spring, Fountain, Bourne (a stream that often flows only in wet seasons), Burn, Ffynnon (Welsh for spring), Tobar (Gaelic for well).
- Look for the **start** of blue lines. Where a stream appears from nowhere, there is usually a spring.
- Contour lines that bend into **V-shapes pointing uphill** mark stream valleys. Ridges point downhill.
- Marsh symbols, field drains, troughs and ponds all indicate shallow groundwater.

Free and cheap digital tools

Tool	What it gives you
OS Maps app and website	Current 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 mapping; works offline when downloaded in advance
OS Open Rivers (open data)	The river and stream network as digital data
National Library of Scotland historic maps (maps.nls.uk)	Free old Ordnance Survey maps for all of Britain, which often show wells, pumps and springs later dropped from modern maps
British Geological Survey viewers	Bedrock and superficial geology; helps you find where springs should be
MAGIC map (magic.defra.gov.uk)	Includes groundwater Source Protection Zones and other designated areas
Environment Agency Catchment Data Explorer	Water quality classification for rivers and lakes
Coal Authority interactive map viewer	Old mine entries and mine-water discharge points to avoid

Reading the ground

Springs form where water-bearing rock (chalk, limestone, sandstone, gravel) sits on top of clay or mudstone. The water travels sideways until it meets the surface at the junction, creating a **spring line**. Compare the BGS geology map with the contours and look for that junction partway down slopes, at the foot of an escarpment and at the head of valleys.

Check upstream before you trust anything

Look for on the map	Why it matters
Farms, barns, fields marked for livestock above the source	Manure and slurry bring bacteria, Crypto and Giardia
Houses and hamlets above the source	Septic tanks and soakaways can leak into groundwater and streams
Sewage works, landfill and old tips	Direct contamination; also overflows after heavy rain
Roads, car parks, industrial sites	Run-off with oil, salt and metals
Old mine shafts, adits and spoil heaps	Acidic, metal-rich water that treatment will not fix
Campsites and popular footpaths	Human waste near water
Ponds, lakes and slow lowland streams	Prone to algal blooms; slow-moving water holds more contamination

Ranking natural sources (best to worst)

- **A tested, protected spring at its source**, with farmland and housing below it, not above.
- **Upland streams** above farmland and settlements. Peat-stained water looks alarming but is usually fine once filtered.
- **Lowland rivers** and streams, only after heavy treatment.
- **Ponds, lakes and canals**: last resort only, and never if there is a scum or bloom.

How to assess a spring

- **Flow**: time how long it takes to fill a 10 litre bucket, in a wet period and again in a dry one.
- **Clarity after rain**: a spring that runs clear after heavy rain is usually well-filtered groundwater. One that turns cloudy or brown is mixing with surface water and needs full treatment.
- **Temperature**: groundwater stays at nearly the same temperature all year (around 10 degrees C in the UK). Big seasonal swings suggest shallow or surface inputs.
- **Surroundings**: walk the ground above it. Fences, livestock, septic tanks and tracks all matter.
- **Test it if you want to be really certain**: a lab sample for coliforms and E. coli, ideally after wet weather and in summer.

Collecting without contaminating

Use a clean container reserved for the job. Never put a dirty bucket straight into the spring. Fill gently from a spout or by submerging a clean bottle, without stirring up silt. Wash your hands first.

6. Legal and practical

Not legal advice

Rules differ between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and they change. Check with the relevant regulator before relying on any of this.

Access and permission

- In England and Wales you can lawfully use public rights of way and open access land (for example, mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land), but that does not automatically include enclosed fields or private springs.
- A spring on private land is someone's spring. **Ask the landowner.** Most are reasonable about a few buckets, much less so about trespass or damage.
- Scotland's responsible access rights are broader, but come with responsibilities.

Abstraction licences

Abstraction means taking water from a river, stream, spring or ground source. The limits differ across the UK:

Nation	Regulator	Threshold	Conditions and notes
England	Environment Agency	Generally no licence needed for 20 m³ a day or less (20,000 L), as part of a single operation	If you take from the same source at several points, the combined total must stay within 20 m ³ a day
Scotland	SEPA	Under 10 m³ a day (10,000 L) is covered by the General Binding Rules: no application needed if you comply	You must be able to show you take under 10 m ³ in any day; keep leaks to a minimum; no abstraction within 50 m of an existing well, spring or borehole used for a water supply . Above 10 m ³ a day, other SEPA authorisation rules apply
Wales	Natural Resources Wales	Abstractions of more than 20 m³ a day are likely to need a licence	Since 2018 some previously exempt activities and areas (including irrigation) need licences if they are above the threshold. Check with NRW
Northern Ireland	NIEA	Not researched for this guide	Check with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

For scale, a 20 litre container is 0.02 cubic metres, so filling a few containers by hand is tiny compared with any of these limits. If you plan pumps, pipes or tanks, check with the regulator first. In Scotland, ask SEPA how the 50 metre rule applies near an existing spring. Rules change, so always check the current regulator guidance.

Private water supplies

If you or your community rely on a spring, well or borehole, you are on a **private water supply**. Local authorities must risk-assess and sample these supplies, with the Drinking Water Inspectorate setting guidance. A notable exception is a supply to a single untenanted dwelling, where a council only has to act if the owner or occupier asks. Contact your local council's environmental health team for sampling and advice.

Other points

- **Fire hydrants** belong to the water company and fire service. Using them without permission is not allowed, and it can contaminate the network.

- **Water companies** have duties during unplanned interruptions, including providing replacement water and informing customers where to get it. Some also have voluntary compensation schemes.
- **Take care near water:** steep banks, fast flows, flooding and slippery ground cause more harm than germs do.
- **Do not advertise** a good source. A quiet word with neighbours is better than a public post with map references.

7. Transport

1 litre weighs 1 kilogram. A 20 litre container is a heavy carry, and the distance matters far more than the volume. A realistic sustained load for most adults is 15 to 20 litres over a short distance, and much less over a mile or more.

Option	Capacity	Good for	Limits
Rucksack with bladder or bottles	3 to 12 L	Hands-free carrying over rough ground	Low volume; very heavy above 10 L
Two 10 L containers, one in each hand	20 L	Short trips, balanced load	Hand fatigue; poor on slopes
Jerry can with carry handle or wheels	20 L	Single container, easy to stack	Awkward over long distances
Sack truck or garden trolley	40 to 60 L	Best value on pavements and tracks	Struggles on soft or steep ground
Bike with panniers or trailer	20 to 60 L	Faster for 2 to 5 km round trips	Balance and braking when loaded
Car or van	100 L or more	Larger volumes	Needs fuel; secure containers so they cannot slide

Good habits

- Run **two colour-coded sets** of containers: one for untreated water, one for treated water.
- Fill containers to the top to stop sloshing, and lash them upright so they cannot tip.
- Use a funnel and a cloth pre-filter when filling, and carry a spare lid or cap.
- Never use a container that has held fuel, chemicals or cleaning products.
- Add a hand pump or siphon if you rely on large tanks.
- Work out your round-trip time and daily need before you need it. A household of four using 20 litres a day needs one full container daily.

Planning an actual route

- Walk the route in daylight and in poor weather before you need to.
- Plan an alternative in case the first source is unreachable, flooded or compromised.
- Travel in pairs where possible, and take the filter, tablets and a first-aid kit.
- Remember return trips with a full load take longer, and your stamina is not infinite on a restricted diet.

8. Urban dwellers: a different plan

*If you live in a flat or a town house with no garden, you have fewer natural options than people in the country, but you also have different advantages: shorter distances, more neighbours, and organised help is likely to arrive sooner. The plan is simple: **store more, treat everything, and think about your building.***

Your three priorities

- **A proper store** of at least tier 1, ideally tier 2 (section 1). You cannot rely on finding natural water nearby.
- **A treatment kit** that works on poor-quality urban water: a microfilter plus chemical tablets, and a way to boil.
- **A building-aware plan** covering pumps, lifts, tanks, stairs, shared pipework and neighbours.

Where to store water in a small home

Space	How to use it
Under beds and sofas	Flat, stackable containers or multipacks of bottled water
Bottom of wardrobes	Heavy containers at floor level
Freezer gaps	Sealed bottles filled about three-quarters full; they also keep food cold during a power cut
Bath	Emergency fill: use a clean bath or a bath-liner bag when you hear warnings
Balcony or utility cupboard	Shaded water butt-style containers if allowed; beware frost and sun
Kitchen cupboards	Do not forget: a few litres of bottled water in the cupboard is better than none

Know your building and your supplier

- **High-rise buildings:** pumps and header tanks can fail when power goes, and upper floors lose supply first.
- Know where the **main stopcock** is and how to close it. Know whether you share a pipe.
- **Register with your water company's Priority Services Register** if anyone in your household is elderly, disabled, has a medical need or relies on water for health reasons.
- Sign up for **text and email alerts** from your supplier, and follow them on social media. In an interruption they publish where bowzers and bottled water points are.
- Check your **Local Resilience Forum** and council websites for local emergency plans.

Urban water sources, ranked

Rank	Source	Treatment and warnings
1	Stored water	Safe if stored properly; rotate regularly
2	Hot water cylinder and drained pipework	Switch off heaters first; boil or filter. Typically tens of litres
3	Rainwater from a balcony, roof or tarp	Filter and disinfect; avoid metal, bitumen, bird-dropping-heavy surfaces and flat roofs that cats can reach
4	Parks, rivers, lakes	Last resort. Filter and disinfect. Avoid anything with algal scum
5	Canals and urban ponds	Poorest quality; heavy contamination likely. Flushing and washing use only, unless desperate
No	Dehumidifier or air-conditioning condensate	Contains dust, microbes and sometimes metals. Fine for flushing, not for drinking
No	Swimming pools, hot tubs, fish tanks, radiators	Chemicals and contaminants. Use for flushing at most

Sanitation matters too

When water is off, sewers may keep working for a while, but not forever. Flush with a bucket of grey water or rainwater. If waste starts backing up in lower floors, stop flushing and switch to a bucket and bin-liner toilet system with absorbent material. A stock of bin liners, a lidded bucket and hand sanitiser is cheap insurance.

Community

In a block or terrace, you are likely to have vulnerable neighbours. Knowing who they are, and agreeing a simple plan with two or three households, can double the effective size of your store and halve the work of collecting. Check on older residents early.

9. Checklists and budget tiers

Starter kit

Tier	What you get	Rough cost (check current prices)
Starter	Multipack bottled water or a few 10 L containers filled and dated; chlorine dioxide or NaDCC tablets; a lidded bucket; bin liners; a kettle or stove with fuel	Low tens of pounds
Solid	Everything above, plus a hollow-fibre microfilter, two 10 L or 20 L containers, a colour-coded clean and untreated set, a bath liner bag and a few spare tablets	Roughly £50 to £120
Serious	Gravity filter or purifier, 100 to 300 L of stored water, a water butt with first-flush diverter, a sack truck, spare filter and tablets, a test kit and a lab sample for any spring you use	£150 and up

Twice-yearly check (spring and autumn)

- [] Rotate stored water and replace the dates on the labels.
- [] Wash and sanitise containers that have been refilled.
- [] Check tablet expiry dates and the integrity of the packaging.
- [] Test your filter's flow rate; backflush if needed. Inspect for cracks or freezing damage.

- [] Check your fuel supply and stove.
- [] Walk your planned collection route and check the source is still clean and accessible.
- [] Check the water company's contact details and your Priority Services Register entry.
- [] Update your plan for any changes in household size, pets or medical needs.

Before an announced interruption or storm

- [] Fill bath, pans, kettles and spare containers.
- [] Charge phones and power banks.
- [] Locate torch, spare batteries, tablets and filter.
- [] Check on vulnerable neighbours.
- [] Turn off the immersion heater if you plan to drain the hot water cylinder.

10. A real-world example: a village with two springs

The author's village sits roughly halfway down a large hill and has two very clean springs. This is a good example of both the opportunity and the responsibility that come with a natural source.

What the setting gives you

- **Gravity:** water that comes from higher ground can flow downhill without pumps or power.
- **Redundancy:** two springs mean that if one fails, is damaged or becomes contaminated, the other can carry the load.
- **Time-tested flow:** a spring that has run for generations through dry and wet years is a better bet than a newly discovered trickle.

What it still demands

- **The catchment above you is your risk.** Being halfway down the hill means everything above the spring (fields, tracks, houses, septic tanks, livestock) can affect what comes out. Know what is above, and keep an eye on any change.
- **'Very clean' is not 'tested'.** Get a lab sample, ideally at least once in wet weather and once in summer, and repeat annually.
- **Keep a baseline log:** flow rate, clarity and temperature in different seasons. Changes are your early warning.
- **Protect the source:** fence off the immediate area, prevent animals and vehicles from approaching, and keep the collection point tidy.
- **Design a good collection point:** a pipe or spout over a hard-standing, with a place to put containers that never touches the ground and a drain for overflow.
- **Agree who owns and looks after it.** Where a spring serves several households, a short written agreement and a simple rota prevent disputes.
- **Still treat the water** in an emergency. A filter and tablets cost almost nothing when set against the consequences of getting it wrong.

The lesson for everyone

Even a perfect-looking source is only as good as its catchment and your testing. Whether you have two springs, a single stream or a bath full of mains water, the principles are the same: know where it comes from, test it, store it cleanly, and treat it.

Sources and further reading

- GOV.UK: Check if you need a licence to abstract water (Environment Agency) gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-need-a-licence-to-abstract-water
- Drinking Water Inspectorate: private water supplies, roles and responsibilities dwi.gov.uk/private-water-supplies
- Ofwat: supply interruptions ofwat.gov.uk/households/supply-and-standards/supply-interruptions
- SEPA: abstraction from the water environment, less than 10 m³ per day (General Binding Rules) sepa.scot
- Natural Resources Wales: abstraction licensing naturalresources.wales
- National Library of Scotland: historic Ordnance Survey maps maps.nls.uk
- British Geological Survey map viewers bgs.ac.uk
- MAGIC map (Defra) magic.defra.gov.uk
- Environment Agency Catchment Data Explorer environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning
- Coal Authority: interactive map viewer (search GOV.UK for the current link)
- Always read the manufacturer's instructions for tablets, filters and bleach.

Important notice

This guide is general information for preparedness planning and is not professional, medical or legal advice. Water treatment methods vary in effectiveness, doses and contact times depend on the product and conditions, and regulations differ across the UK and change over time. **Always follow product labels, check current rules with the relevant regulator, and seek expert testing for any supply you rely on.** If you are pregnant, immunocompromised or caring for infants, take extra care and take professional advice.

Food When The *Shops Stop*

www.foodwhentheshopsstop.com

Water first. Then food. Our free calculator works out how many seeds, how much land and how many kilograms per year your household needs. 55 crops, 8 climate zones, no account needed.