

NATURAL SUNSCREENS · REFRESHING SUMMER FRUIT SALADS · SPORTS MEDICINE

JUNE 1990

USA \$3.00 □ CANADA \$3.50

EASTWEST

THE JOURNAL OF NATURAL HEALTH & LIVING

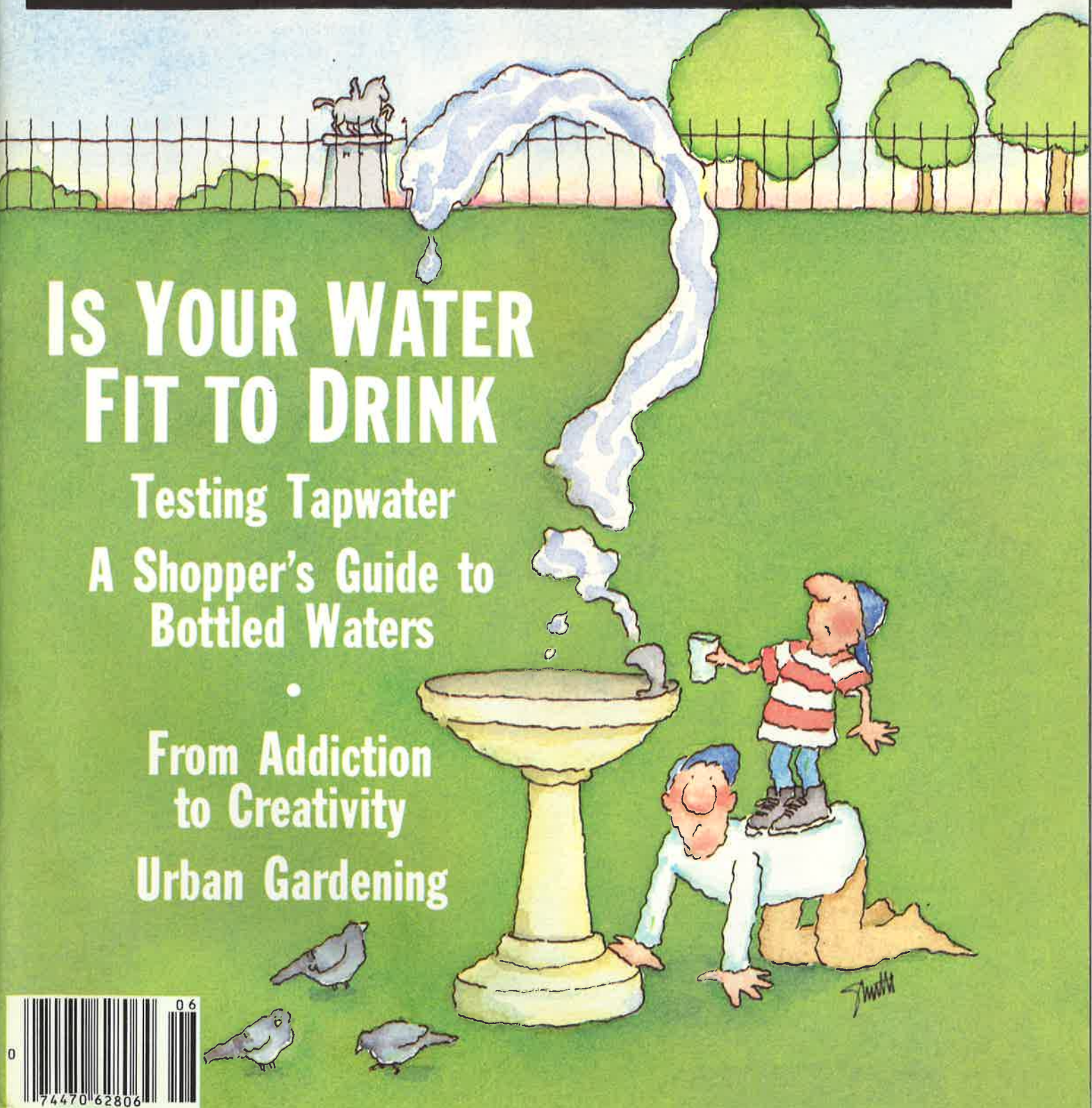
IS YOUR WATER FIT TO DRINK

Testing Tapwater

A Shopper's Guide to
Bottled Waters

From Addiction
to Creativity

Urban Gardening





ultraviolet light, and ozonation.

Before investing in any of these options, however, it is well worth it to determine which major contaminants, if any, are in your home's water. By law, you are entitled to see the results of water tests conducted on your municipal system. You can contact the water utility directly. If you get a runaround, call the state health department, which keeps copies of the same records. Either for free or for a duplicating charge, you can get monitor records, notices of any violations of federal or state regulations, and records

university lab which will do analysis tests for the public. Each state also has EPA-certified labs used for public water systems. Lists of these labs can be obtained at the eight regional offices of the EPA through its Division of Drinking Water. There are also a few national labs that offer mail order water testing. When you inquire about a lab, find out what tests are performed, costs, and whether the lab is approved by the EPA, the Water Quality Association, or any other organization.

Not every lab can perform full testing of drinking water. State hygienic labs, for example, often offer a low-cost test to private well owners, which looks for bacteria, nitrate, and iron, and usually costs under \$20. A high nitrate level is also often an indicator that other chemicals, such as pesticides, are present and that your water should receive further testing.

could be naturally occurring. Sometimes the packages include tests for bacteria and/or lead or trihalomethanes.

Many consumers now test their water for many or all of the contaminants specified on the Safe Drinking Water Act's list—even when they use public water. For costs from \$200 to \$400, a person can cover all EPA parameters and more with multi-residue tests for pesticides, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and SOCs. (In the past it cost \$800 to \$1,000 for tests for such contaminants, if one could even find a qualified lab.)

Most water samples to be professionally tested can be taken by the homeowner. Tests can require filling up to a half-dozen bottles and vials. Users of private wells are usually asked to draw their samples as close to the well as possible, usually at the faucet on the pressure tank in the basement. Persons on municipal systems can draw samples from the kitchen tap. Some labs require you to remove aerators from faucets or to flush the system before collecting. Other labs also ask for a "first draw" sample of water that has stood in the pipes overnight to compare with the flushed supply, to see whether there are problems in your plumbing system. Every company asks you to avoid touching rims or insides of sample bottle lids, as a precaution against introducing foreign bacteria.

Mail order companies usually use overnight express for bacteria testing. Plan to return samples for nitrate and alkalinity quickly after drawing. Good tests also include cold packs to hold samples at 4°C. After testing, the lab should send you: printouts showing the contaminants tested for, EPA "Recommended Maximum Contaminant Levels," the readings, the lab's comments on the significance of these readings, and its suggestions for remedies. □

Home Water Testers

The following three labs offer a variety of water test options.

Laboratory	Test	Price
National Testing Laboratories 6151 Wilson Mills Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44143 (216) 449-2525 (800) 458-3330	• Lead	\$ 29.00
	• Nonurban (73 items) 14 metals, 48 VOCs, coliform bacteria, 10 inorganics and physical factors	\$ 89.00
	• Same as above with pesticides (20)	\$119.00
Suburban Water Testing Laboratories 4600 Kutztown Road Temple, PA 19560 (800) 433-6595	• Lead	\$ 19.00
	• 33 VOCs	\$ 55.00
	• 42 parameters—VOCs, radon, nitrate, bacteria	\$148.00
	• Above with either 20 pesticide or 14 metals	\$240.00
	• With both pesticides and metals	\$390.00
WaterTest 33 S. Commercial St. Manchester, NH 03101 (603) 623-7400 or (800) 426-8378	• Economy Purity Test: pH, 8 inorganics and coliform	\$ 75.00
	• Without coliform	\$ 65.00
	• VOCs and above, total of 59 parameters	\$115.00
	• Or substitute either pesticides (12) or PCBs (8) for VOCs in above tests	\$115.00
	• Or gang VOCs, pesticides and PCBs	\$305.00

of complaints made by any consumers. In rare instances, people have had to file Freedom of Information Act requests to obtain this information. But most authorities will tell you if they have had problems and will divulge which contaminants were involved.

Many large cities have a municipal lab, a state hygienic laboratory, or a

Urban residents also have concerns, so a few consumer-oriented labs have designed packages for these people. Typically, the package will combine tests for some cosmetic secondary characteristics, like hardness and pH, with tests for either industrial solvents (synthetic organic compounds, or SOCs) or inorganics such as heavy metals and minerals that

Resources

National Sanitation Foundation
3475 Plymouth Road
P.O. Box 1468
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
(313) 769-8010

Water Quality Association
4151 Naperville Road
Lisle, IL 60532
(708) 505-0160

EPA Drinking Water Hotline
(800) 426-4791
(202) 382-5533 in Alaska and D.C.
Ask for the number of your local EPA Division of Water Quality