Without the threat of severe weather or the need for immediate emergency medical care, potable water will be your first concern following any type of disaster. I always advise my consulting clients to strive for at least three independent sources of water for cooking and drinking. For example, stored water, a water well, and a rainwater collection system.
I cannot stress enough the need for reliable water sources. Without water, most people will die in only 3-4 days - a lot sooner if the weather is hot and you have no shelter, or you have to do a lot of physical labor or activity. A person needs about two quarts of water per day to stay healthy barring extreme weather or a lot of physical exertion.

Adding a minimum of one gallon of water for cooking, cleaning, and sanitation, a medium-sized family of four requires almost 30 gallons of water per week at a minimum just to stay alive. That is around 1,440 gallons per year.

Unfortunately, most preppers do not have enough room to store 1,440 gallons of water. Therefore, I suggest that you strive for, at a minimum, 55 gallons per person. If you live in an arid region of the country, I suggest you double or triple this amount.

You will also need to have several different methods of water purification available to you. We will go into detail about water purification methods in the following paragraphs, as well as how to store water long-term.

A Death by Contaminated Water: A few years ago, my grandfather told me a story that illustrates how deadly contaminated water can be. It happened in the summer of 1934 when he was only 9 years old. He was out in the fields gathering corn with his dad, brothers, and sister.

He said it had to be at least 100 degrees because the sun was bright in the sky and the sweat burned his eyes as it dripped from his forehead. His eleven-year-old sister got thirsty, and instead of going to the house to get water, she drank from a nearby stream. She died a few days later.

Upon further investigation, it was discovered that a cow from a nearby farm had died upstream from where she drank, contaminating the water. They used the water from that same spot for years with no ill effects, so they thought it was safe, but it was not.

**From U.S. Army Field Manual 21-76**

By drinking non-potable water, you may contract diseases or swallow organisms that can harm you. Examples of such diseases or organisms are:

- **Dysentery** - Severe, prolonged diarrhea with bloody stools, fever, and weakness.
- **Cholera and typhoid** - You may be susceptible to these diseases regardless of inoculations.
- **Flukes** - Stagnant, polluted water - especially in tropical areas - often contains blood flukes. If you swallow flukes, they will bore into the bloodstream, live as parasites, and cause disease.
- **Leeches** - If you swallow a leech, it can hook onto the throat passage or inside the nose. It will suck blood, create a wound, and move to another area. Each bleeding wound may become infected.
Moreover, pollutants from human activities often find their way into the water - e.g., trash, animal feces, fertilizers, herbicides, oils, heavy metals, salts, and pollutants from vehicles etc. It's impossible to tell with 100% certainty what water is safe to drink without laboratory testing.

There are, however, some general guidelines that can help. Running water is generally safer than still water. Below are tips to keep in mind as you look for water:

- Look for clear water.
- Avoid water that has algae growing in it.
- Avoid discolored water.
- Avoid water from marshes/swamps.
- Avoid cloudy water.
- Avoid water that has an odor.
- Avoid floodwater.
- Water always flows downhill.
- Listen for the sound of frogs.
- Never eat snow without first melting it to avoid speeding up hypothermia.
- Freshly fallen snow on a clean surface is fine but old snow might be contaminated with bacteria.
- Never drink water from a lake or stream that is near or downstream from agricultural land, factories or mines.
- Rainwater is perfectly drinkable as it falls from the sky.
- The safest way to treat questionable water is to first boil it and then filter it.

**Berkey Water Filters**

The spring water where I live runs in a constant flow from the side of the mountain and it is as clear as bottled water; however, I will not drink it or use it for cooking without first running it through my Berkey water filter. A good water filter is necessary, and one of the very first survival preps that you should invest in. I suggest that your first choice is a [Berkey water filter system](#).

My father and grandfather used to drive out to my place most weekends and fill their jugs from the spring - they drank and cooked using the water without any filtration or other purification. They have never had any trouble. Still, I prefer to filter all of my water before drinking.

The Berkey filters are extremely effective at removing pathogenic bacteria, cysts, parasites, chemical contaminants, and impurities. The elements have an indefinite shelf life and will filter
at least 3,000 gallons of water before needing replacement. My filters are stored in zip-lock bags inside a small plastic tote.

**Boiling Water**

Boiling water is one of the surest methods of water purification. This method of water purification will effectively kill viruses and bacteria. However, boiling will not remove chemicals and other pollutants such as lead, oil, and fuel.
To purify water by boiling, all you need is a heat source, a suitable container, and water. Bring the water to a rolling boil to kill any viruses or bacteria that may be present. Contrary to what a lot of survival “experts” say, you do not have to boil the water for five to ten minutes in order to kill any viruses and bacteria that it might be harboring. All that is required is that the water reaches a rolling boil.

Warning: boiled water tastes stale; however, the taste is improved greatly by pouring the water back and forth between two containers to re-oxygenate it.

**Sodis Method of Water Purification**

The Sodis method of water purification is one of the simplest and most cost-effective water purification methods available to the prepper or anyone needing potable water; however, like boiling, the Sodis water purification method does not remove chemicals, metals or other solids. All you need are plastic (PET) or glass bottles, water, and sunlight. The image below from [https://goo.gl/m03zMY](https://goo.gl/m03zMY) explains it better than I can in words (image used with permission).

**Water Purification Tabs**

Water purification tabs have been used by hikers and the military for years. They are a lightweight and portable way to effectively purify water for safe consumption. However, like boiling and the Sodis method, these tabs will not remove chemicals or metals.

The military suggests adding two tablets to a quart of water and letting it sit for thirty minutes or more before drinking. However, there are a number of different brands of water purification tablets on the market and you should follow the exact instructions for the brand you are using.

**Purification with Bleach**
Water purification with bleach is one of those methods detailed in every survival book and any article that even hints at ways to purify water. However, it is not my first choice. If possible, I would use another method such as boiling or Sodis.

Water treated with bleach (only use unscented bleach) tastes like, well like bleach. Long-term use may lead to an increased cancer risk. I do not like it and will not use it unless no other alternative is available. Add four drops of unscented bleach (or two teaspoons per ten gallons) to each two-liter of water and let stand for 30 minutes before using.

Making Urine Drinkable through Distillation

Urine can be made drinkable (and clean) via simple distillation, which will also work for seawater. However, the downside to distillation is that it takes a significant amount of energy to boil the water for the duration required.

Pre-filtering

No matter what water purification method you use, it is a good idea to “pre-filter” any dirty or murky water. You can use a coffee filter, a clean shirt, or a bandana. This will help remove any larger particles from the water, making it more potable and increasing the life of water filters used.

Emergency Water Storage and Containers
As for water storage, I have six five-gallon containers that I bought at Wal-Mart in the sporting goods department. I have also set up a 200-gallon rainwater catchment system and another 55-gallon food grade barrel that I installed to catch water runoff from the roof of my chicken coop. I use this water for my chickens, but of course, if needed, I could filter and drink it too.

If you live in one of the drier desert regions, water would be a major concern and that may necessitate the storage of thousands of gallons of water for an emergency. A rainwater catchment can be as sophisticated as the one pictured below or as simple as purchasing a livestock watering tank or kiddie pool and catching the rainwater from your downspouts.

You can also rig tarps or plastic sheeting to funnel the rainwater into the containers. Do not store water in used five-gallon milk jugs. They are not strong enough for long-term storage and will break down and leak.

The five-gallon containers sold in the sporting goods section of most department stores work great as do the 55-gallon food-grade plastic drums. Just be sure that the drums are clean and contain no harmful chemicals before filling. If you must use small containers, emptied 2-liter soda bottles work well. They are stronger than the aforementioned milk jugs, have better lids, and are more convenient to use.
A Note about Tap Water for Long-Term Storage
If you are storing tap water from a municipal water system, there is usually no need to add bleach as suggested by some writers. Water from the municipal tap already contains enough chlorine to prevent any bacterial growth and can be stored without any other additives.

When putting water away for long-term storage, I use a Water Preserver Concentrate from Amazon.com instead of bleach. Water preserver concentrate will extend the storage life to up to five years.

**Choosing the Right Retreat Property to Ensure Water Independence**

When buying a retreat property, your first consideration should be to secure a reliable, non-grid dependent water source. The best source would be a deep well (have it tested before using, especially if it’s an old well). The next best option would be a full-time spring. And finally, the next best option would be a river or creek, or even a pond or lake.

All water from ponds, rivers, and streams should be treated as if it is contaminated with the worst pathogens, just to be on the safe side. Better safe than sorry, I always say.