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Time to Dispose of the Disposable Water Bottle

[Household, Roundups](#)Reviewed by [Kyle Stack](#) · February 13, 2012

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The Bobble Mini is one of several bottles we tested with an integrated carbon filter. *Photo by Ariel Zambelich/Wired*

We live in one of the countries where easy access to clean, safe drinking water has long been the norm. Compared to some parts of the world, we're spoiled silly. And yet, for some reason, we still buy a whole lot of bottled water.

According to [data from the Beverage Marketing Corporation](#) released in September 2011, Americans drank 8.75 billion gallons of bottled water in 2010. That's roughly 28 gallons per American, and a 3.6 percent rise over 2009. Of course, the vast majority of it comes in single-use plastic bottles. These are a waste — they cost a dollar or two each, the contents have to be transported long distances, and the bottles themselves aren't always recycled properly.

The Environmental Protection Agency developed [new guidelines](#) in 2010 for drinking water that made it safer and better-tasting. But many Americans just can't swallow the facts, insisting their tap water lies

beyond the threshold of drinkability.

Several companies are making affordable reusable bottles with active carbon filters inside. For \$10 or \$15, you can buy a bottle that can remove chlorine and other contaminants from tap water, improving the taste while reducing the fiscal and environmental burden associated with single-use disposables.

How do we wean these nay-sayers off the cursed disposable plastic bottle? Try giving them a bottle with an integrated filter.

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Replacement filters are as cheap as \$2 or \$3 each.

I had the opportunity to review four filter-enabled water bottles that are made for use with tap water.

Mind you, these aren't designed to purify water from a lake, stream or other natural source that's potentially contaminated with Giardia or some other nasty bug, so keep your inner outdoorsman at bay.

My first specimen was the [Bobble Mini](#), which looks like a baby bottle. It comes in three sizes — 34 ounces (\$13), 18.5 ounces (\$10), and 13 ounces (\$9) — and the smallest one, which I tested, certainly feels like a baby bottle. The plastic body is soft, so much so that Bobble warns against squeezing it too hard. But the body's hourglass design looks modern, and it's easy to grip. The filter and pop-up cap come in an array of vibrant colors, too.

Before you drink from it, you have to fill it up once and squeeze the water out to remove the carbon dust from the filter. This initial rinse is standard practice with carbon filters. After that, the water tasted great, although getting enough of it with each squeeze was difficult. I found myself having to suck on the Bobble's cap with a little extra force to get the amount of water I wanted each time. Not exactly problematic, but it felt like more effort than should be necessary with a water bottle. Bobble says each filter is good for 40 gallons, or about two months.

Next, I tried the [CamelBak Groove](#), which comes in 20 and 25-ounce versions (\$25 and \$27). It sports a beautiful, rigid plastic body you can buy in a variety of muted colors. There are also stainless-steel versions (\$35 to \$37) which would be right at home on a hiking or camping trip. All the CamelBak Grooves come with an integrated loop handle so you can carry it with a finger or attach it to a pack.



The Hydros water bottle. *Photo by Ariel Zambelich/Wired*

While the Groove wins for best design among the bottles I tested, its performance falters. The plastic bite valve, in particular, was a pain. In order to drink, you're supposed to bite down slightly on the valve as you raise the bottle. This is an awkward way to consume a beverage. I had to constantly find the correct angle to get the water in my mouth once the bottle was one-third full or less. I shouldn't have to think this hard to drink water. The water also tasted somewhat plastic-y. The filter lasts for 48 gallons, or roughly three months.

Bottle number three was the [Rubbermaid Filter Fresh](#). This thing won't win a beauty contest — the bright colors (mine was light green) look like something taken from a Play-doh kit. It is easy on the hands, though, as its flexible body isn't too delicate or too rigid. As with other Rubbermaid products, I feel like this can withstand a heavy impact. A loop handle makes it easy to carry, although the loop isn't integrated as seamlessly into the design as it is with the Groove.

My 20-ounce Filter Fresh (\$10) performed ably. "Installing" it was as simple as removing the plastic overwrap from the filter, filling the bottle once, then squeezing out the water to remove loose carbon particles. The cap makes it easy to take bigger sips, so I ended up using this bottle more than the others. The water tasted clean at first, but unfortunately, a slight carbon taste developed after I used it consistently for two weeks. A built-in tracking device allows you to set a dial for when the filter needs to be replaced. Rubbermaid recommends replacing the filter every two to three months. Perhaps it should be replaced more frequently.

Batting cleanup is the [Hydros](#), which comes with a mission: for every bottle purchased, Hydros donates \$1 to sustainable water infrastructure projects throughout the world. The bottle, which comes in 16 and 24 ounce versions (\$24 and \$30), has a clean design that flares out slightly at the base. The lid has a side port — to fill the bottle, you flip the port open and pour your tap water into the cap, where it drains

through the filter and into the reservoir. A second hole, which leads directly to the reservoir and is exposed by twisting the top of the cap, is used for drinking.

Unfortunately, the Hydros' cap is poorly designed and tough to use. It's difficult to disassemble, which is necessary when installing or replacing the filter. Then, after soaking the filter for a few minutes, I had trouble re-inserting the filter and popping the cap back in place. After that, I couldn't get the cap to turn properly — the cap has to turn so that the side port opens for re-filling. It's all too complicated for a water bottle. The small hole in the lid delivered a surprisingly steady stream of water, though. And while the water tasted fine, the frustrating setup left a bad taste in my mouth.

Of all the bottles I tested, the two cheapest — the Bobble Mini and the Rubbermaid — are the ones I'd recommend for most people. Outdoorsy types might enjoy the CamelBak more, given its rugged construction and the option to upgrade to a stainless steel case.

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