
Mysteries of Bottled Water

I overheard a conversation in the airport the other day concerns the traveler's choices in bottled water. Most bottled water drinkers think bottled water is safer to drink than tap water. In fact, bottled water may not be any better than tap water. Bottled water costs much more and there can be confusion in understanding the meaning of all the labeled names.

The U.S. government regulates both tap and bottled water. Tap water is monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency and bottled water by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In recent years, bottled water consumption has soared. There are more than 700 brands on the market and Americans annually imbibe 2.5 billion gallons of bottled water. It is clearly viewed as a low calorie alternative to pop and as a "better tasting" drinking water.

Bottled water is regulated as a food. Manufacturers must submit samples regularly for FDA testing. Contaminants found in bottled water must be less than the allowable levels found in tap water. Bottled water also must have a nutrition label. Tap water is also tested on a regular basis by all water system suppliers. Cities like Beatrice have vigorous testing requirements. The test results are available to anyone interested. If the standards are not met the city must notify the water users and take immediate action to solve the problem. We are very blessed to have a high quality supply of underground water for most of the county residents. Some rural homes in south and southeast Gage County are challenged to find a quality water source. Rural homes are responsible for their own water testing. Test bottles are available at the Extension Office. Bacteria testing should be done yearly and nitrate tests every three years.

The FDA has defined the different types of bottled water available in many grocery and convenient stores. They are:

-  **Artesian** -- This is water from a well that taps a confined aquifer where the water level stands at some height above the top of the aquifer.
 -  **Drinking** -- This is any water sold for human consumption in sanitary containers, which contains no added sweeteners or chemical additives, other than flavors, extracts or essences.
 -  **Mineral** -- This is water that contains minerals at a standard level. These minerals must be naturally present and can't be added.
 -  **Purified** -- This is produced by distillation or some process to remove minerals. Distilled water is an example of purified water. Other types of purified water are de-ionized water or reverse osmosis water.
 -  **Sparkling** -- This is water that after treatment and possible replacement with carbon dioxide contains the same amount of carbon dioxide that it had at its source. It is not the same as soda water, seltzer water or tonic water, which aren't considered bottled water.
 -  **Spring** -- This is water derived from an underground natural spring. It may or may not be carbonated.
- Well** -- This is bottled water from a hole bored, drilled or otherwise constructed in the ground, which taps aquifer water.

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