



# Top-Rated WATER FILTERS

- Pitchers • Faucet-Mount • Countertop
- Under-Sink • Shower-Head

By James J. Hodl

**W**ater, water everywhere, but is it safe to drink? For most people, the answer is probably yes. Except for homeowners who get water from private wells, municipal water-treatment systems governed by Environmental Protection Agency standards do an admirable job in providing homes with safe drinking water.

But there is room for improvement. Federal standards set maximum allowable levels of specific chemicals, salts and dissolved solids, so municipal water is not contaminant-free. Trace levels remaining can vary, and storms or other occurrences can tax the abilities of treatment plants. Even after water is treated, it can pick up new contaminants such as lead, copper and organic matter while passing through aging water pipes.

An irony of treating water is that the chlorine added to kill microorganisms that cause illnesses such as cholera and dysentery also gives water a stale quality that can affect the taste of foods cooked in it and beverages made with it.

Seekers of more filtered, tastier and more healthful water can buy distilled water (\$1.45 a gallon in stores; even more when purchased in 12-oz. bottles). But a less expensive option (as little as 7 cents a gallon) is to filter home tap water. Numerous products do everything from simply *polishing* water (taking out chlorine and other taste-altering and odor-causing substances, such as hydrogen sulfide gas, which causes water to smell faintly of rotten egg) to tackling serious contaminant problems.

**Diverting Demand.** Because drinking and cooking are the primary uses of purified water in the home, says Tom Palkon, director of product certification at Water Quality Association, an independent organization that verifies the contaminant-