Many people are concerned about the toxins, contaminants, and bacteria that can be found in drinking water. Water filters are now commonplace in many homes.

Carbon filtration is the most popular; units contain carbon held within a filter. They work quickly to remove bad taste, chlorine, and other chemicals. Regularly replacing the filter is important, as once saturated with contaminants, it ceases to function.

Reverse osmosis forces water through a semipermeable membrane, filtering heavy metals, some bacteria, pesticides, sulphates, and nitrates. The process is slow and wastes a lot of water, but removes almost 99 percent of contaminants.

Steam distillation involves collecting steam from heated water, then condensing it. It is useful for removing pesticides, nitrates, and heavy metals. Maintenance is simple as no filter is involved but the system requires a lot of energy to run, and organic chemicals such as benzene and chloroform will not be removed.

Whichever type you prefer, proper maintenance is critical to keeping your water filter functioning optimally.

Star anise: pretty but potentially poisonous

You’ve heard of the herb with the pretty name, but the possible effects of consuming some types of star anise may be dangerous. Health Canada recently advised consumers not to drink teas containing star anise unless they can be certain that it is Chinese star anise (Illicium verum).

Both the US and Europe have reported adverse reactions from ingesting star anise including mild nausea, convulsions, and seizures. Star anise is found in blended herbal teas and therapeutic and natural health products, and is also sold in bulk for use as a tea. It is also used for decorative and aromatic purposes. Japanese star anise (Illicium anisatum) is one variety that is safe for decorating as long as it is not ingested. Make sure to use only Chinese star anise for consumption. Consult a product’s manufacturer if unsure.