

Sourcing & Hauling Water

Storing Water Correctly covers water you already have, and Water Purification covers making questionable water safe to drink. Neither covers the step in between: what to actually do once the stored supply is running low and you need to find, and physically move, more.

Where to actually find more water

- **Official emergency distribution.** After a declared disaster, FEMA runs Disaster Recovery Centers that can point you to water access; find the nearest one with FEMA's own DRC locator. Local 211 (dial 211, or 211.org) is a second, often faster route to the same information, since it covers local and county-level services a national locator won't always have yet. Know both exist before you need them, look-up time matters when you're already low.
- **A private well, if you have one.** Most residential wells need electricity to run the pump, so a well without backup power is only as useful as your generator or battery setup; see Fire-Starting & Generator Safety for running one safely. Check now, not during an emergency, whether your specific well has any manual or bucket-accessible option.
- **Open sources: streams, lakes, reservoirs.** Usable, but always treat before drinking or storing, see Water Purification above. In Northern Utah specifically, check the Utah DEQ's harmful algal bloom advisories before drawing from Utah Lake or the Jordan River; a bloom can make water dangerous even after normal disinfection. How you actually collect it matters too: draw from moving, flowing water rather than a still or stagnant edge, dip from a straight, uniform stretch of the channel rather than a backwater or eddy, and scan the area upstream first, a beaver dam, grazing livestock, or a heavily used campsite upstream all raise contamination risk. Dip the container slowly and lift it out without letting it touch the streambed; microorganisms concentrate in bottom sediment, and stirring it up puts more of them in your container, not less. Avoid collecting for a day or two after heavy rain if you can wait, runoff washes surface contamination into the water and raises the bacterial load right when it's hardest to see.
- **Neighbors and your local network.** Someone nearby may have a well, a cistern, or stored water to share, especially once a real local network exists before you need it, not improvised after.
- **Rainwater, where it's legal.** See Legal Rainwater Harvesting in Utah for the actual rule and a basic collection setup, set up in advance, this isn't something you can build mid-emergency.
- **No source at all nearby.** See Collecting Water From Snow, Dew & Condensation for melting snow correctly, dew collection, transpiration bags, and an honest look at solar stills as a genuine last resort, rated for how much they actually produce rather than survival-show hype.

Hauling it home

Water is heavy, and that fact alone shapes every decision here: how much you bring back per trip, whether you carry it or wheel it, and how many trips a day are actually realistic.

Container (full)	Approximate weight	How to move it
1 gallon	~8.3 lb	Carry by hand, no problem
5-gallon jug	~43–44 lb	Carry short distances; use a dolly or cart for longer ones
8-gallon wheeled container	~70 lb	Built for wheeling, not carrying
15-gallon container	~125 lb	Near the limit of what one person should move alone; use a cart or two people

A working rule of thumb

Use a dolly or wheeled cart for anything over 5 gallons, and keep any load you're actually carrying by hand under about 50 lb. A garden cart, a hand truck, or even a sled in snow all beat repeated trips carrying a heavy jug, especially once hauling becomes a standing weekly task rather than a one-time trip.

If hauling by hand is genuinely the only option, a shoulder yoke, a wood or bamboo bar carried across the shoulders with a bucket balanced on each end, is the real historical answer to why hand-carried water is traditionally split into two containers rather than one big one. It shifts the load off your hands and forearms onto your shoulders and torso, which handle sustained weight far better, and a balanced load on both ends stops water from sloshing out with every step the way a single unbalanced bucket does. Two 5-gallon buckets on a yoke is a genuinely easier carry over distance than the same 10 gallons split one-handed.

For repeat trips rather than a single big haul, collapsible containers, water bladders, or fold-flat jugs pack smaller on the way out and are easier to fill from an awkward source (a shallow stream, a distribution point's own spigot) than a rigid barrel. Keep at least one rigid container too, a collapsible one is easy to puncture and harder to move once it's damaged.

Treat it before you drink it, treat it again before you store it

Water from any source outside your own sealed, known-good storage is untreated by default, regardless of how clear or clean it looks. Treat it using the methods in Water Purification before anyone drinks it. If you're bringing it home to add to your bulk storage rather than drinking it immediately, follow Storing Water Correctly's container-cleaning and treatment steps too, don't just top off a storage container with untreated water because it's going to sit for a while first.

This is also the task the Act of Surviving's Tier 2 weekly rhythm means by "water sourcing": a standing, planned trip, not a scramble the day the stored supply finally runs out.

Sources

- FEMA, finding water and other assistance after a disaster (Disaster Recovery Center locator): FEMA; FEMA DRC Locator
- 211, local emergency and community service referrals: 211.org
- Utah Division of Water Quality, harmful algal bloom advisories for Utah Lake and the Jordan River: Utah DEQ
- Water weight and container capacity figures: CrystalQuest; manufacturer specifications, 8-gallon wheeled container
- Safe stream-water collection site selection, sediment disturbance, and post-rain contamination risk: USGS; Battlbox
- Shoulder yoke mechanics and balanced two-bucket carrying: Digging in the Driftless; Lehman's