



The Bucket Test Field Checklist

The professional protocol for proving whether your pool is leaking — in 24 hours, with a bucket.

Advanced Leak Detection — Pools & Spas · Serving Tampa Bay, St Pete & Sarasota since 1997 · (727) 467-0078
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Why the bucket test works

Every Florida pool loses water to evaporation daily — typically 1/16" to 1/4" per day. The bucket test is the only reliable homeowner method for separating that normal loss from a real leak. Because the bucket and the pool share identical weather, temperature, humidity and wind for the same 24 hours, their evaporation must match. **Any difference between the two is your leak, measured.**

BEFORE YOU START

Set aside a 24-hour window with no swimming, no topping off, and no rain in the forecast if possible. You'll need: a 2–5 gallon bucket, a sharp pencil, and (if you have a spa or fountain) a way to siphon an inch of water.

Step 1 — Prepare the pool

- ☐ **Shut the system down.** Turn the breaker off or put the equipment in Service Mode, with every body of water filled to its proper running level.
- ☐ **Isolate raised bodies of water.** If you have an attached spa or fountain, siphon it down about 1 inch below its spillover lip so it can't trickle into the pool during the test. (Same applies to negative-edge pools.)
- ☐ **Valve off suction and return lines if you can.** Point three-way valves "off" toward the higher body of water, and include solar plumbing.

A CAUTION FROM THE FIELD

Valves that haven't been turned in years may not reseal once moved. If a valve looks ancient, leave it alone and simply note it — an imperfect test beats a new leak at the valve.

Step 2 — Set up the bucket

- ☐ **Fill the bucket** with pool water to within an inch of the rim.
- ☐ **Place it on the top step**, at least half-submerged. This keeps the bucket water at pool temperature — critical for an accurate result — and it should get roughly the same sun exposure as the pool surface. No suitable step? Use a swim-out, or weight the bucket on a platform.
- ☐ **Mark the level with a pencil "Y"**. Draw a diagonal line through the waterline inside the bucket, then a second line crossing it exactly at the water's surface. The intersection reads far more precisely than a thick marker stripe.

Step 3 — Mark the pool

- ☐ **Mark the pool the same way** — on the tile or inside the skimmer, using the same "Y" technique.
- ☐ **On a long pool, mark the middle of the long side**, where wave action distorts the reading least.

Step 4 — Wait 24 hours, then compare

- ☐ **Don't swim, don't top off, don't touch the bucket.** Leave the pump off for the full 24 hours.
- ☐ **Compare the two marks.** Levels should track within 1/16 inch per day of each other.

Reading your result

BOTH DROPPED THE SAME AMOUNT

Evaporation only — no leak. If heavy loss recurs in high season, simply run the test again.

POOL DROPPED MORE THAN THE BUCKET

You have a leak. The difference between the two marks is your leak rate. Note whether the loss continues at the same pace with the pump on vs. off — that pattern is gold for your technician.

BUCKET DROPPED MORE THAN THE POOL

Something interfered — wind, a tipped bucket, or an inaccurate mark. Re-run the test.

Have a spa or fountain? Read this

With multiple bodies of water the interpretation changes: if the **higher** body dropped and the lower body didn't rise, you have a leak. But if the **lower** body **came up** while the higher one dropped, the culprit is more likely a failed check valve or Jandy valve letting water flow backwards between bodies — a different (and usually cheaper) repair than a structural leak.

ONE WARNING WORTH REPEATING

Never intentionally let your pool keep draining to “see where it stops.” If the water inside falls below the water table outside the shell, hydrostatic pressure can lift the entire pool out of the ground. Keep it topped up while you wait for your appointment.

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Read the full guide: advancedleak.com/guides/pool-leak-vs-evaporation/