

What Kind of Water Pipe Do I Have?

A magnet and a coin tell most metal pipe apart; color and print tell plastic pipe apart.

METAL PIPE	MAGNET	SCRATCHED	JOINTS
Copper	Doesn't stick	Penny color	Soldered or fitted
Lead	Doesn't stick	Shiny silver	No threads, often a bulge
Galvanized steel	Sticks	Stays gray	Threaded
Brass	Doesn't stick	Gold	Threaded

PLASTIC PIPE	LOOKS LIKE	PRINTED	CARRIES
PEX	Bends; white, red, blue	PEX, F876/F877	Hot and cold
CPVC	Rigid, cream or tan	ASTM D2846	Hot and cold, 180°F
PVC	Rigid, white	D1785 or D2665	Up to 140°F

Copper print color: green Type K, blue Type L, red Type M (water); yellow DWV (drains).

Might be lead? Contact your water utility and have the water tested. There's no known safe level of lead in a child's blood.

A magnet also sticks to black iron gas pipe. Follow a magnetic pipe before loosening anything.

PVC carries water up to the house and drain water, not water lines inside. Schedule 80 PVC is dark gray.

Gray plastic or no print: check with a plumber. Older homes can have polybutylene.

Sources: US EPA, DC Water, Copper Development Association, Uponor, Charlotte Pipe, plumbing code tables (Michigan).

