

Sweetwater Plumbing

(909) 312-4516

The Homeowner's Plumbing Guide

Understand your system. Handle emergencies. Maintain it year-round.

- How your plumbing works
- Your shut-off valves
- Emergency first response
- Emergency numbers to fill in
- Seasonal maintenance
- Monthly & annual checklists
- Preventing common problems
- When to call a pro

A practical handbook for Inland Empire homeowners

24/7 service · Call (909) 312-4516

Text: (909) 247-6791
info@sweetwaterplumbing247.com
Serving the Inland Empire since 2010

4667 Holt Blvd
Montclair, CA 91763
C-36 · CSLB #889182

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How to use this guide

Skim the table of contents and bookmark the sections you'll need fastest: emergencies and shut-off valves. The maintenance checklists in Section 5 are designed to be photographed and saved on your phone. And when something is beyond a DIY fix, Sweetwater Plumbing is one call away at **(909) 312-4516**.

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1. How Your Home Plumbing Works

Your home has two separate plumbing systems that never mix: one brings clean water *in* under pressure, and the other carries waste water *out* using gravity. Understanding this division makes nearly every plumbing problem easier to diagnose.

The Supply System

Cold water enters your house from either a municipal main or a private well, passing through a water meter (in most homes) and a main shut-off valve. From there it branches: one path feeds cold-water fixtures directly, while the other runs through your water heater and on to every hot-water tap. Because the supply system is pressurized, a leak anywhere in it will keep flowing until you shut off the supply. That's why locating your main valve before an emergency is the single most important thing in this guide.

The Drain-Waste-Vent (DWV) System

Waste water leaves fixtures through traps, the U-shaped bends under sinks that hold a small pool of water to block sewer gases. From there it flows downhill through progressively larger drain pipes to your sewer line or septic tank. Vent pipes run upward from the drains and exit through the roof, letting air in so water can flow out smoothly. If you've ever heard a sink glug or smelled sewer gas, a venting issue is a common culprit.

Key Components You Should Recognize

- **Water heater:** typically a 40- to 80-gallon tank in the garage, a utility closet, or an exterior closet. Tankless units are wall-mounted and compact.
- **Main shut-off valve:** usually where the supply line enters the house, often on an exterior wall near the front hose bib or in the garage (see Section 2).
- **Fixture shut-off valves:** small valves under sinks and behind toilets that isolate one fixture without killing water to the whole house.
- **Pressure-reducing valve (PRV):** a bell-shaped brass valve on the main line that keeps incoming pressure at a safe 50 to 70 PSI. Water pressure runs high across Southern California, so have your regulator tested every year.
- **Cleanouts:** capped fittings on drain lines (often outside near the foundation) that let a plumber snake the line if it backs up.
- **Electrical breakers:** make sure your electrical panel is clearly labeled for plumbing appliances (water heater, dishwasher, disposal, washing machine). In an emergency you need to be able to kill power fast.

2. Know Your Shut-Off Valves

Before anything else, walk through your home this week and locate every shut-off valve. Label them if possible. When water is spraying across your kitchen at 2 a.m., you will not have time to learn this.

Main Water Shut-Off

This is the master switch for the entire house. In Inland Empire homes, look in these places, in order of likelihood: outside on an exterior wall (often the side of the house facing the street, near the front hose bib); in the garage; in a utility closet; or in a buried box near the curb (often requiring a special key tool). On older raised-foundation homes, the valve may be in the crawlspace, where the line first enters the house.

Most main valves are one of two types: a **ball valve** (lever handle: a quarter turn closes it) or a **gate valve** (round wheel: turn clockwise several rotations to close). Test yours once a year by fully closing and reopening it; valves that sit untouched for years can seize. Don't force a stuck gate valve with a wrench; old ones can break.

> **Important: turn off the water heater too**
>
> If you shut off the main supply and drain the lines, also switch off power to your water heater (breaker for electric; gas control to OFF for gas). Heating a tank that may be partly empty can burn out an electric element or damage a gas heater.

Fixture Shut-Off Valves

Every toilet, sink, dishwasher, washing machine, and refrigerator (if it has an ice maker or water dispenser) should have its own shut-off valve. Toilets have one valve on the wall behind the bowl; sinks have two (hot and cold) inside the vanity. Knowing these means a leaky faucet or running toilet only interrupts one fixture, not your whole home.

Gas Shut-Off (If Applicable)

Gas water heaters have a dedicated gas valve on the supply line near the unit. The main gas shut-off is at the meter, outside the house; a 12-inch or larger adjustable wrench turns it a quarter turn so the tab sits crosswise to the pipe. If you smell gas, leave first and call SoCalGas (1-800-427-2200) and 911 from outside. Don't flip switches on your way out. Shut the gas off at the meter only if it's safe, from outside. Once the gas is off, don't turn it back on yourself; only SoCalGas should.

> **Smell gas?**
>
> Leave the house first and call SoCalGas at **1-800-427-2200** and **911** from outside. Don't flip switches. Shut the gas off at the meter only if it's safe, from outside. Once it's safe, call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** to find and repair the leak and pressure-test the line.

3. Plumbing Emergencies: First Response

In a true emergency, your job is not to fix the problem; it's to stop it from getting worse until a plumber arrives. Here's how to handle the most common ones.

Burst Pipe

- **Shut off the main water valve immediately.** Every minute costs you gallons.
- Open the lowest faucet in the house (often an outdoor spigot, garage utility sink, or laundry tub) to drain the remaining water from the lines.
- If you can reach the breaker panel without standing in water, switch off the water heater (or turn a gas heater's control to OFF) and any circuit near the leak. Never touch switches or cords while standing in water.
- Move valuables and use towels, buckets, or a wet/dry vacuum to contain water.
- Call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516**.

Overflowing Toilet

- Close the shut-off valve behind the toilet (turn clockwise until it stops).
- If the valve is stuck, lift the tank lid and push the flapper down with your hand to seal it, then lift the float arm to stop the tank from refilling.
- Once water is contained, plunge with a flange (toilet) plunger using firm, steady strokes, not aggressive ones.
- If plunging doesn't clear it, the clog is deeper. Stop and try a toilet auger.

No Water at All

Check whether your neighbors have water. If they're out too, it's a municipal issue; check with your water provider (see the list on page 5). If only you are out, check that the main valve hasn't been accidentally closed or partially turned. If your home is on a private well, the pump or pressure tank may have failed. If you can't find the cause, call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516**. Diagnosing a no-water situation often means testing the pressure regulator and main line with the right gauges.

Sewer Backup

Multiple drains gurgling, toilets bubbling when you run the washer, or sewage coming up in the lowest drain (often a garage floor drain, laundry drain, or shower) means your main sewer line is blocked. **Stop using all water immediately:** every flush and shower makes it worse. Sewer backups can also be caused by city main problems after heavy rain, so check whether neighbors are affected. Call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** to clear the line and run a camera through it; this is not a DIY job.

Water Heater Leaking

A puddle around the base of a tank water heater often means the tank itself has failed and the unit needs replacement. Shut off the cold-water supply valve at the top of the heater, kill power (breaker for electric; gas control to OFF for gas), and call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516**. Don't delay: a fully ruptured tank can release 40+ gallons fast.

Gas Smell

If you smell gas, leave first and call SoCalGas (**1-800-427-2200**) and **911** from outside. Don't flip switches or do anything that could make a spark on your way out. Shut the gas off at the meter only if it's safe, from outside. Once it's safe, call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** to find and repair the leak and pressure-test the line.

Emergency Numbers

Fill these in now and tape them inside a kitchen cabinet.

Sweetwater Plumbing (24/7)	**(909) 312-4516**
Sweetwater text line	**(909) 247-6791**
SoCalGas leak hotline	**1-800-427-2200**
City water department*	
Family emergency contact	
Other	

*** Your City Water Department**

For street-side main shut-offs, billing, or to report a leak in the public right-of-way. After hours, call the number on your water bill.

Ontario	Municipal Utilities Co. **(909) 395-2050**
Chino	City Utility Billing **(909) 334-3264**
Chino Hills	City Utility Billing **(909) 364-2660**
Fontana	Fontana Water Company **(909) 822-2201**
Rancho Cucamonga	Cucamonga Valley Water District **(909) 944-6000**
Upland	City Water Billing **(909) 931-4150**
Montclair	Monte Vista Water District **(909) 624-0035**
Pomona	City Water & Sewer **(909) 620-2241**
Claremont	Golden State Water Co. **1-800-999-4033**
Riverside	Riverside Public Utilities **(951) 782-0330**

4. Seasonal Maintenance

Inland Empire homes have a different plumbing rhythm than the rest of the country. You won't fight frozen pipes, but you will fight hard water, high water pressure, high summer demand, sediment buildup from heat, and the occasional drought-restriction wrinkle. A few seasonal habits keep your system running through Santa Ana winds, triple-digit summers, and everything in between.

Spring

- Inspect outdoor spigots and hose bibs after the rainy season. Look for leaks, drips, and any corrosion at the threads.
- Walk your irrigation system before the dry season hits. Check for broken sprinkler heads, leaking drip lines, and pooling water; a single broken head can quietly waste hundreds of gallons a month.
- Inspect visible pipes under sinks, behind toilets, and in the garage for any signs of slow drips, white mineral crust, or warped cabinet bottoms.
- Clear leaves and debris from yard drains and area drains so the next big storm doesn't back up onto your patio or into your garage.

Summer

- Flush sediment from your water heater (see Section 6). Inland Empire water is hard, and tanks accumulate calcium faster here than in most of the country. Annual flushing is not optional if you want the tank to last.
- Inspect washing machine supply hoses for bulges, cracks, or rust. Replace rubber hoses with braided stainless steel if you haven't already; they're cheap insurance against a flooded laundry room.
- Check toilet seals by looking for moisture around the base and gently rocking the bowl. Any wobble means the wax ring or flange needs attention.
- Look for slab leaks. In SoCal slab-on-grade homes, the warning signs are unexplained warm spots on floors, a water meter that keeps running when nothing is on, or sudden jumps in your water bill. Call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** the moment you suspect one.
- If you have a pool, check the equipment pad for any new drips at the pump, filter, or heater connections. Summer is when worn O-rings start to fail.

Fall

- After Santa Ana winds, walk the property and clear debris from outdoor drains, area drains, and gutters before the first rains.
- Test your main shut-off valve by closing and reopening it. Valves left untouched for years can seize; if yours is stiff or won't close fully, have it repaired or replaced before an emergency.
- Have your pressure regulator (PRV) tested. Water pressure runs high across Southern California, and the regulator should be tested every year; fall is an easy time to remember it.
- Inspect the water heater pressure-relief valve (Section 5) and have the anode rod checked if your heater is more than 5 years old. Hard water eats anode rods faster than most homeowners realize.
- Schedule a sewer line camera inspection if your home is older or has mature trees nearby. Root intrusion into clay or cast-iron sewer lines is the most common serious plumbing problem in older Inland Empire neighborhoods.

Rainy Season

- Southern California has no real winter, just the rainy season. Before the first storm, make sure gutters, downspouts, and yard drains carry water away from the house so it doesn't pool against the foundation.
- Check outdoor spigots and hose bibs for drips and corrosion. A slow leak outside can run for months unnoticed.
- Heavy rains expose drainage problems fast. Watch for water pooling near the foundation, sewer cleanouts overflowing, or any gurgling in floor drains. All are signs to call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** before the next storm.
- If you'll be traveling over the holidays, shut off the main water valve and turn the water heater to VACATION mode. A small leak in an empty house can do enormous damage before anyone notices.

> **The Inland Empire difference**
>
> Hard water, high water pressure, slab foundations, Santa Ana winds, and a short, heavy rainy season shape almost every plumbing problem we see here. The habits in this section are written for those conditions, not for a cold-climate home.

5. Monthly & Annual Checklists

Quick visual checks catch small problems before they become expensive ones.

Monthly

TASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR
Check under every sink	Water stains, mineral crust, soft cabinet bottoms, or musty smell
Inspect washing machine hoses	Bulges, cracks, rust at the connections, or any dampness
Look at the water heater base	Any moisture, rust streaks, or pooled water means trouble
Listen for running toilets	Phantom flushes or hissing can waste hundreds of gallons a month
Check your water bill	Sudden spikes often signal a hidden leak

Once a Year

TASK	WHY IT MATTERS
Flush water heater	Sediment buildup wastes energy and shortens tank life
Test pressure-relief valve	If it can't release pressure, the tank can rupture
Exercise main shut-off valve	Prevents it from seizing when you need it most
Test water pressure and regulator*	Should be 50 to 70 PSI; above 80 PSI is too high
Inspect caulking	Around tubs, showers, and sinks; re-caulk if cracked
Clear yard & area drains	Prevents pooling near the foundation in the rainy season
Check septic system (if you have one)	Have it inspected; pump every 3 to 5 years depending on household size

> * Water pressure runs high across Southern California, so have your **pressure regulator (PRV)** tested every year. If you have a PRV and your pressure is above 80 PSI, it needs to be adjusted or replaced. If you don't have one and your pressure is above 80 PSI, you need a PRV installed. A working PRV protects you from burst pipes and failed appliances: washing machine and dishwasher pumps, water heater tank failures, faucet cartridges, and much more. When an expansion tank is installed on your water heater, its air charge must be set to match your house pressure before it goes in; Sweetwater always does that step. Call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** to test, diagnose, or install.

6. Preventing the Most Common Problems

Clogged Drains

The best clog strategy is prevention. Kitchen drains clog from grease (which solidifies as it cools) and fibrous food scraps. Never pour fats, oils, or grease down the drain; wipe pans with a paper towel and trash it. Coffee grounds, eggshells, pasta, rice, and stringy vegetables should also go in the trash or compost, not the disposal. Bathroom drains clog from hair and soap scum; an inexpensive hair-catcher screen in each shower and tub stops most of it.

When a drain does run slow, skip chemical drain cleaners. They're hard on pipes, especially older ones, and dangerous if they don't fully clear the clog. Try running very hot tap water down kitchen drains (skip boiling water: it can soften PVC joints and crack porcelain), a plunger for any drain, or a hand-cranked drain snake for stubborn clogs. Baking soda and vinegar make a satisfying fizz but rarely clear anything serious.

Slab Leaks

Most Inland Empire homes are built on concrete slabs with copper supply lines running through or under them. Over decades, hard water, soil chemistry, and small movements can wear those lines through, and the first sign is rarely obvious. Watch for unexplained warm spots on tile or vinyl floors, the sound of running water when nothing is on, a water meter dial that keeps spinning, hairline cracks in flooring, or a sudden jump in your water bill with no explanation. Slab leaks don't fix themselves, and the damage grows the longer they run. Pinpoint detection and repair (or rerouting overhead) is a job for a licensed plumber. Call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** the moment you suspect one.

Hard Water and Scale

Inland Empire water is hard: high in calcium and magnesium. Over time, scale coats the inside of pipes, fills the bottom of your water heater, clogs aerators and showerheads, and shortens the life of every fixture in the house. You can soak removable aerators and showerheads in white vinegar to dissolve buildup. For whole-house relief, a salt-free water softener cuts scale buildup, extends appliance life, and helps your water heater run more efficiently (a scale-free tank heats better). We install salt-free systems only: they add no salt to your water or the sewer, and many Inland Empire cities ban new salt-based softeners. Sweetwater Plumbing can evaluate your water and recommend a system sized to your household: **(909) 312-4516**.

Running Toilets

A toilet that hisses or refills on its own is wasting water, sometimes thousands of gallons a month. Almost always it's one of two parts: the rubber flapper at the bottom of the tank (warped, mineral-coated, or no longer sealing) or the fill valve (the vertical assembly, usually on the left side of the tank). The fix is usually an inexpensive flapper or fill valve from any hardware store and an adjustable wrench. Turn the supply valve off behind the toilet, flush to drain the tank, sponge out the rest, and swap the part.

Leaky Faucets

A faucet dripping once per second wastes about 3,000 gallons a year. For compression faucets (separate hot and cold handles), the fix is usually a new rubber washer in the handle. For modern single-handle faucets, it's the cartridge inside the body; replacement cartridges are sold for nearly every major brand, often with a model number stamped on the faucet itself. Turn off the supply valves under the sink, plug the drain (small parts love to fall in), and take photos at each step of disassembly.

Water Heater Sediment

Minerals settle to the bottom of tank water heaters, creating a layer that insulates the burner from the water. That means you pay to heat sediment instead of bathwater. Annual flushing removes it.

- Turn the gas control to PILOT (or switch off the breaker on an electric heater) and shut off the cold-water inlet at the top of the tank.
- Attach a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom and run it outside or to a floor drain, away from people and pets. The water is hot enough to scald.
- Open a hot-water faucet somewhere in the house to let air in, then open the drain valve and let the tank drain fully.
- Close the drain valve and reopen the cold-water inlet to refill the tank. Keep the hot tap running until water flows steadily with no sputtering; that means the tank is full. Only then restore power or gas.

> **Older water heaters: be careful**
>
> If your water heater is more than 10 years old and has never been flushed, the drain valve can clog or fail to fully close afterward. If you're not comfortable handling that, skip the DIY flush and have Sweetwater Plumbing do it the first time: **(909) 312-4516**.

7. When to Call Sweetwater Plumbing

Plenty of plumbing tasks are DIY-friendly. But knowing when to stop and call a professional is part of being a good homeowner. Always call Sweetwater Plumbing at **(909) 312-4516** for:

- Any work that involves opening walls, ceilings, or floors to access pipes
- Sewer line problems: backups in multiple drains, recurring slow drains throughout the house, sewage odors that don't go away
- Suspected slab leaks: warm floor spots, unexplained running water, mysterious water-bill spikes
- Water heater replacement (a plumber hauls away the old unit and installs the new one to code)
- High water pressure, or a pressure regulator that's due for its yearly test
- Low water pressure throughout the whole house (could indicate a failing pressure regulator, corroded supply pipes, or a city main issue)
- Discolored water that persists: brown or rust-colored water can mean a corroded main line or a failing water heater anode
- Anything involving the main water line between your house and the street
- Repiping for older homes with galvanized or polybutylene supply lines

Smell gas? Leave first.

Get everyone out, then call SoCalGas at 1-800-427-2200 and 911 from outside. Don't flip switches. Shut the gas off at the meter only if it's safe, from outside. Once SoCalGas says it's safe, call us for the repair.

Sweetwater Plumbing: your local Inland Empire plumber

Licensed since 2007 and serving the Inland Empire as Sweetwater Plumbing since 2010, in Ontario, Chino, Chino Hills, Fontana, Rancho Cucamonga, Upland, Montclair, and nearby cities. From a stubborn clog to a full repipe, and every emergency in between, we're one call away.

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8. Handy Tools & Supplies

You don't need a plumber's truck, just a handful of items that will handle most minor household plumbing situations.

Tools

TOOL	WHAT IT'S FOR
Flange (toilet) plunger	Toilets: the bell-shaped one with an extended lip
Cup plunger	Sinks, tubs, showers: the flat-bottomed one
Hand-cranked drain snake (25 ft)	Clearing clogs the plunger won't
Toilet auger	Toilet clogs a plunger won't clear; its sleeve protects the porcelain
Adjustable wrench (10")	Most fitting and supply-line work
Tongue-and-groove pliers	Larger nuts; gripping odd shapes
Basin wrench	Reaching nuts behind sinks where nothing else fits
Water pressure gauge	Screws onto a hose bib to check your house pressure
Bucket and old towels	Always more useful than you'd think
Flashlight or headlamp	Under-sink work is always dark
Wet/dry vacuum	Cleanup, and pulling water out of overflows

Supplies to Keep On Hand

- **PTFE (Teflon) tape:** seals threaded water connections; wrap 3 to 4 times in the direction the fitting tightens
- **Plumber's putty:** for sealing drains and faucet bases (not for pressurized connections)
- **Extra toilet flappers and fill valves:** universal-fit versions cover most toilets
- **Pipe-repair tape or epoxy putty:** buys time on a small leak until a plumber arrives

> **Final thought**
>
> The single best habit a homeowner can build is the monthly under-sink check from Section 5. A quick look around with a flashlight has saved more homeowners from catastrophe than any plumber's tool. Make it routine: do it on the same day you pay the water bill each month. Sweetwater Plumbing is ready to help when you find something beyond a quick fix: **(909) 312-4516**.