

HOMEOWNER'S PLUMBING GUIDE

2025 EDITION

EXPANDED AND
REVISED!

SIMPLE TIPS TO SAVE YOU
MONEY, HEADACHES, AND
EMBARRASSING PLUMBING
MISTAKES.



VANGUARD
PLUMBING SOLUTIONS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE CREW NEXT DOOR WITH BIG
SMILES AND BIGGER WRENCHES.

WHY IS A PLUMBING COMPANY TELLING ME HOW TO DO THEIR JOB?

First, we believe that you're a smart cookie and sometimes you just need a little help instead of a big smarty pants plumber coming by to tell you to turn this by a degree or jiggle that handle.

Second, we aim to be helpful to everyone in our community BEFORE you need us. That way, when you do need a plumber, you know we're just down the street.

REMEMBER, PLUMBING ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE, YOU GOT THIS.

Plumbing is fun and interesting, but it doesn't take a 12 year degree and some fancy paperwork to do the simple stuff. The tips we outline here are all things that you can work on yourself. You'll just need a couple of simple tools that any homeowner will want to have around anyway.

If you come across a problem that isn't covered here, or is more complex than you thought, don't worry. We've got a crew who would love to help out. Just call us. You'll find our contact info below.

So sit back with a glass of water straight from your pipes and let's get learning together!

Tim
Owner of Vanguard Plumbing



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Handy Plumbing Supplies for Homeowners to Keep Around

- The Mighty Plunger: Your Throne's Best Friend
- Teflon Tape (a.k.a. Plumber's Tape): Small Roll, Big Power
- Adjustable Wrench: The Muscle You Didn't Know You Needed
- Drain Snake (a.k.a. Drain Auger): The Hair Whisperer
- Bucket & Old Towels: Because Plumbing is a Splashy Business

2. An Explanation of Your Home's Plumbing System

- Water In, Water Out: The Two Plumbing Highways
- Pipes Have Types: Meet the Cast of Characters
- Fixtures: More Than Just Fancy Faucets
- The Unsung Heroes: Shut-Off Valves and Cleanouts
- Pressure and Gravity: The Forces Behind the Flow

3. Common Toilet Issues

- The Constantly Running Toilet (It's Not Training for a Marathon)
- The Dreaded Clog (And How to Unclog It Like a Champ)
- Weak Flushes (When Your Toilet's Feeling Shy)
- Wobbly Toilet (A Throne That Rocks Isn't Regal)
- Mystery Leaks Around the Base

4. Shower Drain Problems

- Hair Clogs: The Usual (and Kinda Gross) Suspect
- Soap Scum & Product Buildup: When Your Drain Gets Gunky
- Foul Odors Coming from the Drain
- Standing Water After a Shower
- Leaky Shower Drain (A Sneaky, Under-the-Floor Problem)

5. Slow Bathroom or Kitchen Drains

- Gunk, Goo, and Grime: The Bathroom Sink's Buildup
- Kitchen Sink Shenanigans: The Myth of the Garbage Disposal
- Venting Problems: When Airflow Affects Drain Flow
- Clogged P-Traps: That Curvy Pipe Under Your Sink
- When Multiple Drains Slow Down: The Plot Thickens

6. How to Handle Leaks in Your Plumbing

- Under-the-Sink Drips: The Classic Leak
- Toilet Leaks: Silent But Soaked
- Faucet Drips: The Water Bill's Little Vampire
- Wall or Ceiling Stains: The "Uh-Oh" Leak
- Outdoor Hose Bibs & Spigots: Springtime Surprise Leaks

7. When to Call a Professional Plumber



TOILET HANDY PLUMBING SUPPLIES FOR HOMEOWNERS TO KEEP AROUND

Even if you're not planning to moonlight as a plumber, keeping a few key plumbing tools and supplies on hand is like having chicken soup in the pantry—comforting and often just what you need when things go sideways. You don't need a whole workshop, just a few essentials to help you handle minor mishaps before they turn into major messes.

01 THE MIGHTY PLUNGER

Ah, the humble plunger. It may not be glamorous, but it's the first responder in many a household emergency. When your toilet's threatening to breach the bowl—or your sink suddenly won't drain—a good plunger is your go-to hero.

Make sure you have two types: a cup plunger for sinks and tubs, and a flange plunger (the one with the extra bit at the bottom) for toilets. Using the wrong one is like trying to eat soup with a fork—technically possible, but not very effective.



TOILETS



SINKS

02 TEFLON TAPE (A.K.A. PLUMBER'S TAPE): SMALL ROLL, BIG POWER



This little white roll may look unassuming, but it works magic when you're dealing with threaded connections (like showerheads or hose bibs). Teflon tape wraps around threads to help seal them, preventing leaks from joints where water likes to sneak out.

Just wrap it clockwise around the threads 3–4 times before tightening. It's a bit like plumbing duct tape—easy to use and surprisingly powerful.

03 ADJUSTABLE WRENCH: THE MUSCLE YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

When you're dealing with nuts and bolts in tight spaces, an adjustable wrench will become your trusty sidekick. It's perfect for tightening or loosening plumbing fittings without chewing them up (like you might with pliers).

Get one with a comfortable grip and a solid jaw. Bonus points if you can channel your inner action hero while wielding it—cue slow motion music.



04 DRAIN SNAKE (A.K.A. DRAIN AUGER): THE HAIR WHISPERER

Clogged drains happen—especially in bathrooms where hair and soap gunk team up like mischievous gremlins. A basic manual drain snake lets you break up clogs or fish out gunk without chemicals or a plumber visit.

It's not the most glamorous job, but it sure beats standing ankle-deep in shower water. A 15–25 foot version is more than enough for typical household use.



05 BUCKET & OLD TOWELS: BECAUSE PLUMBING IS A SPLASHY BUSINESS

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Quick Recap – Home Plumbing Kit Essentials:

- Two plungers: one for toilets, one for sinks/tubs
- Teflon tape for leak prevention on threaded fittings
- Adjustable wrench for tightening and loosening connections
- Manual drain snake for hair clogs and gunk
- Bucket and towels for inevitable messes



AN EXPLANATION OF YOUR HOME'S PLUMBING SYSTEM

Think of your home's plumbing system like the circulatory system of your house –it brings in clean water, carries away the dirty stuff, and keeps everything flowing behind the scenes. When it's working, you don't notice it. When it's not... well, that's when the adventure begins.

WATER IN, WATER OUT: THE TWO PLUMBING HIGHWAYS

Your plumbing system has two main branches: the supply side and the drain side.

- The supply side brings in fresh water from your city line (or well) and sends it under pressure to all the faucets, toilets, showers, and appliances in your home.
- The drain side takes the used water and waste and whisks it away to your sewer or septic system using gravity and a bit of clever engineering.

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One brings joy, the other removes the... aftermath. Both are equally important.

PIPES HAVE TYPES: MEET THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

Not all pipes are created equal. Your home likely has a mix of:

- **Copper** – Old-school and reliable, but can be pricey.
- **PEX** – Flexible, colorful (usually red and blue), and common in newer homes.
- **PVC/ABS** – White or black plastic pipes used for drainage.
- **Galvanized steel** – Found in older homes and prone to rust and corrosion over time.

You don't need to memorize these, but knowing the general types helps when something springs a leak or you're chatting with a plumber (or impressing friends at dinner parties).



FIXTURES: MORE THAN JUST FANCY FAUCETS

Every faucet, toilet, tub, and appliance is considered a fixture, and each has its own little world of valves, seals, and drain connections. Fixtures are the access points you see and use every day—but they rely on all that hidden plumbing muscle behind the walls to work right.

Ever notice how a bathroom on the second floor can mess with your water pressure downstairs? That's your plumbing system reminding you that it's all connected.

THE UNSUNG HEROES: SHUT-OFF VALVES AND CLEANOUTS

Two things every homeowner should know about:

- **Shut-off valves:** These let you stop the flow of water to specific areas (like under a sink or behind a toilet) or to the whole house (usually near where the water line enters your home). Handy during emergencies—or when someone drops something they shouldn't have down the sink.
- **Cleanouts:** These are capped pipes that provide access to your drains in case of a major clog. They're usually found outside or in a basement/crawlspace. Not glamorous, but crucial when the going gets gunky.

PRESSURE AND GRAVITY: THE FORCES BEHIND THE FLOW

Your home's plumbing relies on two simple concepts: pressure and gravity.

- Pressure pushes clean water in with enough force to reach your showerhead on the second floor.
- Gravity pulls used water down and out, assisted by the slight angles in your drainpipes and air vents that prevent things from glug-glugging like a science experiment gone wrong.

When either of these forces is off—say, low pressure or poor drainage—you'll notice. But now you'll also understand why.



Quick Recap – Plumbing in Plain English:

- Water comes in (under pressure) and goes out (with gravity).
- Fixtures are the working ends of a bigger hidden system.
- Pipes have different materials with different personalities.
- Shut-off valves and cleanouts = good things to know.
- Plumbing may be quiet, but it's always working behind the scenes.



COMMON TOILET ISSUES

Your toilet is one of the hardest-working members of your household, quietly doing its business day in and day out. But when it starts acting up—running endlessly, clogging constantly, or making strange noises—it’s basically your home’s way of raising its hand and saying, “Help!”

THE CONSTANTLY RUNNING TOILET (IT’S NOT TRAINING FOR A MARATHON)

If your toilet sounds like it’s constantly refilling—even when no one’s using it—you’re probably dealing with a worn-out flapper or a misbehaving float.

Inside the tank, there’s a little rubber flapper that lifts when you flush, letting water rush into the bowl. If that flapper doesn’t seal properly afterward, water keeps leaking through, and the tank keeps refilling. You’ll hear it as a subtle (or not-so-subtle) trickling or refilling noise.

How to Fix It:

- Turn off the water to the toilet (the valve is usually behind it).
- Remove the tank lid.
- Check the flapper—it might be warped, dirty, or just old.
- Replacing it takes 5 minutes and costs less than a coffee run.

Bonus Tip: If the float (the plastic bobber that rises with water) is set too high, the water can overflow into the overflow tube. Adjust it so the water stops about an inch below the top of the tube.



THE DREADED CLOG (AND HOW TO UNCLOG IT LIKE A CHAMP)

Every homeowner faces this moment: the flush, the rising water, the internal scream. First things first—don't panic and don't flush again (that's how floods happen).

Your Game Plan:

- Grab your flange plunger (remember from Section 1?).
- Make sure there's enough water in the bowl to cover the rubber part of the plunger.
- Create a good seal and plunge with steady pressure. It might take 15–20 plunges.
- Listen for that satisfying gurgle and whoosh—that's the sound of victory.

Still clogged? Time to bring out the drain snake. And if that fails, well... you'll find our contact info in the end of this guide.



USE THIS ONE!

WEAK FLUSHES (WHEN YOUR TOILET'S FEELING SHY)

If your toilet is flushing like it's lost its will to live, there might be a partial clog somewhere, or the tank isn't filling properly.

Check the following:

- Is the water level in the tank high enough?
- Is the flapper opening fully during a flush?
- Is there hard water buildup under the rim of the bowl (where the water flows in)?
-

If mineral buildup is the culprit, try scrubbing under the rim with a toilet brush and vinegar. You'll be surprised how much stronger the flush gets once those little holes are clear.

WOBBLY TOILET (A THRONE THAT ROCKS ISN'T REGAL)

If your toilet rocks slightly when you sit down, it could be a loose bolt or a bad wax ring underneath. A wobbly toilet isn't just annoying—it can lead to leaks over time if left unchecked.

What to Do:

- Gently tighten the bolts at the base (don't crank them too hard or you could crack the porcelain).
- If it still rocks, you may need to reseal the toilet and replace the wax ring—a bigger job, but very doable for a confident DIYer.

Or you can shim the base with a few coins or rubber shims if you're looking for a quick fix until you're feeling brave.

MYSTERY LEAKS AROUND THE BASE

Water around the base of the toilet is never a good sign (and no, it's not just condensation—unless it's July and your AC's out). Usually, it means the wax ring seal between the toilet and the floor is leaking.

If you see water pooling around the base, especially after flushing:

- Turn off the water supply.
- Mop up the area and keep an eye out for fresh water.
- If it keeps happening, it's time to lift the toilet and install a new wax ring.

If you're uncomfortable going this deep, you can call on us if you need to. Our contact information is at the back of this guide.



Quick Recap – Toilet Troubleshooting Toolkit:

- Constant running = check the flapper and float.
- Clogs = plunger first, snake second, desperation third.
- Weak flush = clean the bowl rim and check tank water level.
- Wobble = tighten bolts or replace the wax ring.
- Leaks at the base = likely a failing wax seal.



SHOWER DRAIN PROBLEMS

Showers are supposed to be relaxing, but standing ankle-deep in yesterday's soapy water? Not so much. If your drain's not draining, your shower becomes a sad, lukewarm bath you didn't sign up for. Let's look at the usual suspects—and how to handle them.

SOAP SCUM & PRODUCT BUILDUP: WHEN YOUR DRAIN GETS GUNKY

Over time, all the nice-smelling stuff you use—body wash, shampoo, conditioner—can build up inside the pipes. It sticks to the walls and narrows the space for water to flow through, like cholesterol in plumbing arteries.

What Helps:

- Pouring boiling water down the drain once a week can help melt away mild buildup.
- You can also try a combo of baking soda and vinegar (½ cup of each), followed by hot water after 15 minutes. It won't work miracles, but it's a nice maintenance step.

Just don't pour harsh chemical drain cleaners regularly—they can damage your pipes over time and usually don't fix deeper blockages.

HAIR CLOGS: THE USUAL (AND KINDA GROSS) SUSPECT

Hair is the #1 cause of clogged shower drains. It wraps around the drain parts and catches soap scum, forming a nasty little net that slows down the water like a traffic jam at rush hour.



How to Fix It:

- Remove the drain cover (usually pops off or unscrews).
- Use a plastic drain snake or even a bent wire hanger to pull the clog out.
- Be prepared—it's usually a horrifying mix of hair, soap, and "what even is that?"

How to Prevent It:

- Use a mesh hair catcher in your drain. They're cheap, easy to clean, and save your sanity.
- Shave your head. It's not for everyone, but Mr. Clean approves.



FOUL ODORS COMING FROM THE DRAIN

If your shower starts smelling like a swamp monster moved in, the problem might not be a clog—it could be a dried-out P-trap (the U-shaped pipe under the drain) or gunk built up down below.

Check for This:

- If you haven't used the shower in a while, pour some water down to refill the trap and block sewer gases.
- For active drains, try a baking soda + vinegar flush followed by a hot water rinse.
- If that doesn't do it, you might need to deep clean the drain or have the vent stack checked (that's the pipe on your roof that lets sewer air out—important, but out of reach for most DIYers).

STANDING WATER AFTER A SHOWER

If water just refuses to leave the party—even after you've pulled out hair and used the baking soda trick—it could be a clog deeper down the line or an issue with your drain's slope.

Try snaking the drain manually. If that doesn't clear things up, it might be time to remove the drain trap or call in someone with a longer snake (no innuendo intended... probably).

And just to be sure—check that it's not a slow tub drain issue masquerading as a shower clog if your bathroom shares a drain line.



LEAKY SHOWER DRAIN (A SNEAKY, UNDER-THE-FLOOR PROBLEM)

Sometimes the drain itself isn't clogged—but it's leaking underneath the shower or tub. This is harder to spot unless you notice:

- Water stains or dripping from the ceiling below (if it's a second-floor shower)
- A persistent musty smell near the base of the shower
- Loose or creaky floor tiles around the shower

This usually means the seal around the drain has failed. Fixing it might involve removing and resealing the drain or replacing worn gaskets. Not a small task, but catching it early can prevent wood rot and bigger repairs.

Quick Recap – Shower Drain Troubles:

- Hair is the main villain—keep it out with a drain cover.
- Soap scum builds up over time—boiling water helps.
- Smelly drain? Could be a dry trap or buildup.
- Standing water = deep clog or pipe slope issue.
- Leaks from underneath = failed seals and sneaky damage.





SLOW BATHROOM OR KITCHEN DRAINS

There's something incredibly unsatisfying about brushing your teeth or doing the dishes while water pools around your hands like a swamp. Slow drains are annoying, but they're also your plumbing system waving a little red flag. Let's break down what's happening—and how to speed things up.

GUNK, GOO, AND GRIME: THE BATHROOM SINK'S BUILDUP

Bathroom sinks are a magnet for everything gross: toothpaste globs, stray hairs, beard trimmings, soap scum, and the occasional "mystery gloop." Over time, all of this settles in the drain and pipe like sediment in a river, slowly choking the flow.

Here's What Helps:

- Remove the drain stopper (you might need to unscrew it or unclip the lever under the sink).
- Use a plastic drain stick or tweezers to pull out visible gunk. It's oddly satisfying—and gross—in equal measure.
- Follow up with hot water or a baking soda + vinegar flush.

Doing this every few months can keep your bathroom sink flowing like a mountain stream.

KITCHEN SINK SHENANIGANS: THE MYTH OF THE GARBAGE DISPOSAL

We all love the garbage disposal, but it's not a wood chipper. Many folks assume you can toss anything in there—egg shells, pasta, grease—but these items can gum up the works and cling to pipe walls like overcooked spaghetti.

Common Offenders:

- Cooking grease and oils (they cool and harden inside the pipes)
- Coffee grounds
- Starches like rice and pasta (they swell and get gluey)

Better Habits:

- Wipe plates with a paper towel before rinsing.
- Dispose of grease in a can, not the sink.
- Run cold water before, during, and after using the disposal to help flush debris.

VENTING PROBLEMS: WHEN AIRFLOW AFFECTS DRAIN FLOW

Fun fact: your drains need air to flow properly. Every plumbing system has vent pipes (usually going up through the roof) that let air in so water can drain out smoothly.

If your sink drains really slowly and sometimes gurgles like it's trying to speak Parseltongue, you might have a blocked vent.

This one's a little outside DIY territory—but good to know. Especially if plunging and snaking don't seem to help. That's when you can call on us and we'll sort it out with you.

CLOGGED P-TRAPS: THAT CURVY PIPE UNDER YOUR SINK

That U-shaped pipe under your sink is called a P-trap, and it's there to trap debris and prevent sewer gas from coming back up. Sometimes, though, it traps a little too well and ends up being the bottleneck in your drain.

You Can Clean It Out:

- Place a bucket underneath (trust us on this one).
- Unscrew the connections on each end (usually by hand or with channel locks).
- Let the water and gunk dump out. Clean the pipe with an old toothbrush or rag.
- Screw everything back together, run water, and admire your handiwork.

It's a great "look what I just did!" project—just don't wear your favorite shirt.

WHEN MULTIPLE DRAINS SLOW DOWN: THE PLOT THICKENS

If you notice all your drains (kitchen, bathroom, maybe even laundry) are draining slowly, you might have a larger clog deeper in the main line. This usually lives outside your DIY reach and may need a longer auger or pro equipment.

It's like if your whole neighborhood had a traffic jam—it's not just one intersection; it's the whole system that's backed up.

Don't panic. Just keep an eye on which drains are affected, and make note of when it started. That info can be gold if you end up needing professional help.

Quick Recap – Slow Drain SOS:

- Bathroom = hair and soap buildup. Clean the stopper and snake the drain.
- Kitchen = watch what you put down the disposal. Grease is the enemy.
- Gurgling sounds = possible vent issue.
- Under-sink clogs? P-trap cleaning is a simple DIY.
- Multiple slow drains = main line may be partially blocked.



HOW TO HANDLE LEAKS IN YOUR PLUMBING

Water is essential to your home—until it's in a place it's not supposed to be. Then it becomes an uninvited guest, the kind that ruins wood, warps floors, and grows mysterious fuzzy things in the corners. Catching and fixing leaks early can save a ton of money and heartache. Here's how to stay on top of it.

UNDER-THE-SINK DRIPS: THE CLASSIC LEAK

This is the most common leak homeowners spot—and thank goodness, because it's also one of the easiest to fix. You're grabbing a fresh roll of paper towels or a cleaning spray, and squish—your sock is suddenly wet.

Under-the-sink leaks usually come from:

- Loose connections at the faucet or supply lines
- Cracked plastic drainpipes
- Worn-out washers or gaskets

What to Do:

- Grab a flashlight and a dry towel.
- Wipe everything down, then run the faucet and watch closely.
- If the leak is at a joint, try tightening it by hand or with a wrench (gently!).
- Still dripping? You may need to replace a washer, P-trap, or a section of hose. These parts are usually inexpensive and found at any hardware store.

Bonus tip: keep a bowl or pan under the leak while you work. Plumbing leaks have excellent comic timing.



TOILET LEAKS: SILENT BUT SOAKED

Toilets can leak in several sneaky ways, especially at the base or between the tank and the bowl. You might not see the leak—you might hear it (a phantom refill), or notice a musty smell or peeling flooring near the toilet.

Spotting the Signs:

- Water around the base (and it's not just from sloppy aim)
- A slight "squish" when stepping near the toilet
- Bubbling or lifting vinyl flooring nearby

These often point to a bad wax ring or loose bolts. You may need to unseat and reseal the toilet. It's a bigger job but very doable with a wrench, a new wax ring, and a can-do attitude. If you don't feel comfortable with that kind of work, we're just a phone call away. Flip to the end of this guide to get our contact info.

FAUCET DRIPS: THE WATER BILL'S LITTLE VAMPIRE

A dripping faucet might seem harmless—maybe even "soothing" if you're a zen master—but over time it can waste hundreds of gallons of water a year. That's not just bad for the planet—it's bad for your wallet.

Most Common Causes:

- Worn-out washers or O-rings
- Corroded valve seats
- Loose handles

If you're even mildly handy, replacing the internal parts of a faucet is a great entry-level DIY. Turn off the water, disassemble the handle, take the worn parts to the hardware store, and pop in the replacements.

You'll feel like a hero every time you turn it off and hear nothing.



WALL OR CEILING STAINS: THE “UH-OH” LEAK

If you spot a discolored patch on the ceiling or wall, you’re probably looking at a leak from a pipe hidden behind the drywall. These leaks are trickier—they could be from a bathroom above, a loose pipe, or even condensation from an uninsulated line.

What to Watch For:

- Brown or yellow water stains
- Peeling or bubbling paint
- A mysterious musty smell

These often require cutting into the wall to inspect the pipes, so they’re a bit beyond the basic DIY level—but catching them early can prevent mold and serious damage. Shut off the water to that area if you suspect a hidden leak and call us as soon as possible. You’ll find our contact information at the end of this guide.

OUTDOOR HOSE BIBS & SPIGOTS: SPRINGTIME SURPRISE LEAKS

When winter ends and you fire up the garden hose, you might discover water spraying inside the wall instead of out the spout. Frozen pipes that weren’t properly winterized can crack, but you won’t see the damage until the first warm day.

Signs You’ve Got a Problem:

- Water leaking indoors when the hose is on
- Low pressure or uneven flow outside
- Moldy spots on the inside wall near the spigot

You’ll likely need to replace the damaged section of pipe—and consider installing a frost-free spigot for the future. Until then, keep the water turned off to that line. If you need help give us a ring.

Quick Recap – Leaks 101:

- Under-sink leaks? Check fittings, pipes, and seals.
- Toilet leaks? Look for base water or constant refilling.
- Faucet drips? Replace washers or internal parts.
- Wall stains? Hidden leaks need quick attention.
- Outdoor spigots? Watch for cracks after winter.





WHEN TO CALL A PROFESSIONAL PLUMBER (LIKE US!)

Let's be real: some plumbing jobs are perfect for a confident DIY moment and a "look what I fixed!" selfie. But sometimes, the smartest, bravest thing you can do is call in the pros. Plumbing systems can be complex, and water has a way of making small issues into big, soggy problems fast. Knowing when to hand things off to a licensed plumber can save you time, money, and major damage down the line.

Here's a list of situations where it's best to pick up the phone and call in your friendly neighborhood experts—like the folks at The Mammoth Plumber.

- **Burst pipes or major leaks** – If water is gushing or rapidly pooling, it's time to shut off the main valve and call immediately.
- **Low water pressure throughout the house** – Could point to a blockage, corrosion, or something more serious in your main lines.
- **Backed-up sewer lines** – If multiple drains are clogged at once, especially with weird smells or gurgling, you might have a main line issue. Don't try to DIY this one!
- **No hot water** – If your water heater stops working entirely, it could be a failed heating element, a leak, or a more complex system problem.
- **Water stains on ceilings or walls** – These might indicate hidden leaks in your walls or floors—something that needs a professional's tools and touch.
- **Frozen pipes** – If your pipes freeze during winter and you're not sure how to thaw them safely, call in backup before they burst.
- **Bathroom remodels or fixture installations** – For anything involving new plumbing lines, permits, or ensuring everything is up to code, a pro can make sure it's done right.

CALL IN YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD PLUMBER!



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