

TASTE, ODOR, AND COLOR IN WATER FACT SHEET

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Earthy, Musty, Moldy, Grassy Odor

On occasion, mainly during periods of warm weather, Brentwood can experience unusually large algal blooms in our source water; some consumers may experience unpleasant taste and/or odor associated with their drinking water – musty, dirty or earthy.

Some important information and tips to know:

- Algal tastes and odors are purely aesthetic and pose no health risks. The City continues to meet or exceed all Federal and State Drinking Water Regulations.
- The City employs a number of measures to reduce algal tastes and odors; however, if they pass into the treated water distribution system, it may take a few days for them to dissipate.
- Algal tastes and odors are more noticeable in hot water, rather than cold. To reduce unpleasant taste and odor for drinking, fill a pitcher and chill the water.
- Ice may need to be replaced if made when taste and odors are present.
- Odor may persist in hot water longer than in cold water. If this occurs, you may consider flushing your hot water tank.
- Laundry may need to be rerun if it was allowed to air dry.

Another common cause of odor problems is the sink drain. Over time, organic matter (such as hair, soap, and food waste) can accumulate on the walls of the drain and cause bacteria to grow on these organic deposits.

To make sure the problem is not in the tap water, fill a glass with a small amount of tap water, then step away from the sink and swirl the water around inside the glass. If the problem is in the drain, the tap water in the glass should not have an odor.

Chlorinous, Bleachy, Chemical or Medicinal Taste/Odor

There are two common causes for a chlorinous, bleachy, chemical, or medicinal taste or odor in the water.

- Addition of chloramine (total chlorine) that we use to disinfect the water to ensure that it is safe to drink.
- Interaction of chloramine with a build-up of organic material in your plumbing.

Although the total chlorine level is a fraction of what is in pools and spas, you may occasionally detect the smell of chlorine in your water. This odor may be stronger in the shower since chlorine is released into the air more rapidly when mixed with hot water.

If the problem is the water supply, it will occur at every faucet and will not go away after a few minutes of running the water. An easy way to get rid of the chlorine taste and smell is to let water sit in a glass for a few minutes and then chill it in the refrigerator. Cold water tastes and smells better than water at room temperature.

Cloudy, Foamy or Milky Water

Milky white water can also be described as cloudy, hazy, soupy or foamy, and is almost always caused by air in the water. Important information and tips to know:

- Consistent cloudiness in cold and hot water:
 - Tiny air bubbles in water can give water a cloudy or milky appearance. Water in your pipes is under pressure--filling a glass of water reduces that pressure and can cause air bubbles to appear in your water which can look cloudy, milky, or carbonated.

- Troubleshooting:
 - Collect a glass of water and let it stand for two to three minutes. Any air bubbles will rise to the surface and the milky appearance of water should clear starting from the bottom. Entrained air does not affect the quality of your water.

Brown, Red, Orange or Yellow Water

Brown, red, orange or yellow water is usually caused by rust. The major causes of rust include water pipes in your residence or water mains. Some important information to know:

- Intermittent brown, red, orange or yellow hot water. If your water is discolored only for a minute or two after you turn on the tap, the cause may be the internal plumbing. The zinc coating on the inside of galvanized iron pipe can wear thin and expose your water to bare iron. The different colors can be attributed to varying chemical oxidation states of the iron (rust). The longer the water sits in the pipes, the worse the discoloration will be. This is why this problem is most noticeable the first time you turn on the tap in the morning. If only a few taps are affected, only a portion of your internal plumbing has galvanized pipe.
- After running your tap for a few minutes, clean water from your water heater or the water main will replace the discolored water. Since iron is an essential nutrient, this condition poses no health hazard. If the discoloration bothers you, however, flush the tap until the water becomes clear and save the water for iron-loving plants.
- Consistent brown or yellow cold water. Normal pipeline flow allows silt, sediment and other materials to settle to the bottom of the pipe. A disruption of normal flow can cause these materials to get stirred up and suspended in the water and cause the water to look light yellow to dark brown. The discoloration is caused by dissolved iron, which is stirred up in naturally occurring sediments. The following conditions commonly cause flow reversals in water mains and sediment to be disturbed:
 - Planned flushing of the water mains to remove pipeline sediment in the near vicinity.
 - Pipeline repair work or construction activity in the area.
 - Vehicular accident resulting in a nearby fire hydrant being struck by vehicle.
 - Nearby fire hydrant(s) recently used to fight a fire.

The discoloration does not indicate that the water is unsafe or that the integrity of the water main has been compromised. A disinfectant residual is maintained in our system to ensure that the water is safe for household use, including cooking and drinking. For aesthetic reasons, we recommend you avoid doing laundry until the water clears up. We also recommend that you do not use the hot water as it will draw cold, rusty water into the tank and it may need to be flushed out later. If the water at the front hose bib is discolored after running for two minutes, the problem may be coming from our water main and you can contact us.

DrinkTap.org is a great resource for information about drinking water.



Water quality issues in drinking water are important measures of customer satisfaction and perception of water quality. If you have any issues or sudden change in taste or smell in your drinking water, you can contact us at (925) 516-6000 or online at https://www.brentwoodca.gov/gov/pw/service_request.asp.