

Eliminating Rust Sediment in House Pipes

Orange- or red-tinted water flowing from the tap might look disgusting, but if the color is caused by rust, it doesn't pose a health threat. Safety aside, rust-filled water indicates either a problem with the plumbing or something has happened to send sediment out of the pipes and into the tap.

Cause

Iron pipes rust over time, and since the rust has nowhere to go, it ends up in the water stream. Fortunately, this rust normally forms sediment that settles on the bottom of the pipes and remains there so that it doesn't come out the tap. If it gets disturbed or there is an excessive amount, however, it will show up when the faucet is running. Sediment can be stirred up by repairs to the pipes and by changes in pressure.

Check Water Heater

1. Turn off your water heater and let it cool down for a few minutes.
2. Turn on the faucet or shower where the water is "most rusty", making sure you only run cold water.
3. If you still get rust-colored water, then the issue is with one of your plumbing pipes.

Locating the Source

Rust sediment could be coming from either the pipes inside the home or from the main source. An easy way to determine the source is to run the outside faucet that is closest to the main. This is usually in the front of the house, but could be in the backyard if there is an alleyway. Let the water run for two minutes then fill a clean cup and look for signs of rust. If there is rust in the water, it is probably coming from the main supply, but if the water is clear, the problem is with the plumbing in the house.

Flushing

The simplest way to get rid of rust sediment is to flush the pipes. Open three or four cold water taps in the house and let them run for about 20 minutes at top pressure. This should be long enough to clear the pipes of rust sediment, but if it isn't, wait about 30 minutes and then flush them again. Instead of opening faucets in the house, run the hose at full capacity for 20 minutes and use the water on landscape plants to clear the rust.

Replacing Pipes

A small amount of rust on iron pipes is normal, but if there is a large amount of rust and the pipes are deteriorating it may be time to replace them. This is a major home improvement project and will likely require the assistance of a professional. In severe cases, however, it may be the only way to clear the water of rust sediment.