

Dare you drink from a garden hose?



WARNING: This product contains a chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm.

WARNING: This hose is not for drinking water use. This hose is made from recycled materials.

WARNING A label like the one above signals that the hose contains lead.

We'd answer that question by saying it's OK to drink from a hose only if it's labeled safe or if you flush it first. Otherwise, the water standing inside may contain worrisome amounts of lead and other chemicals that leach from the hose itself. Many hoses are made of polyvinyl chloride, which uses lead as a stabilizer.

We tested 16 new hoses, brands sold at national chains and on the Internet. Four were labeled safe for drinking; six had warning labels. The remaining six weren't labeled either way.

The four hoses labeled safe for drinking typically contained less lead in their construction than the others. In our tests, those hoses leached minuscule amounts of lead into water that had been standing in the hose for 20 hours or more. We measured concentrations well below 15 parts per billion, the level in drinking water at which the Environmental Protection Agency requires remedial action. In fact, tap water contained as much lead as some samples. (The time the water stands in the hose, water temperature and acidity all affect the amount of lead leaching.) Hoses containing the highest amounts of lead, only two of which carried a "do not drink" label, leached 10 to 100 times allowable lead levels in the first draw of standing water.

However, even extremely low levels of lead may cause health problems. A recent study reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine* suggests that lead levels in the blood even lower than the current definition of toxicity may adversely affect a child's IQ.

The bottom line. When you buy a hose, choose one labeled safe for drinking. With any hose, flush it by letting the water run for a minute or so before you drink.

SAFE FOR DRINKING (as labeled)

Gardener's Supply Co. 33-469

Teknor Apex Boat & Camper Self-straightening

Swan Marine/Camper

Better Homes and Gardens Kink-free

NOT FOR DRINKING (as labeled)

Colorite Plastics Mainstays Light Duty

Colorite WaterWorks Light Duty

Gilmour Flexogen 7169657
Swan Fairlawn Reinforced
Gilmour Flexogen 10-5805GY
Swan Heavy Duty Soft & Supple
NOT FOR DRINKING (not labeled)
Teknor Apex Light Duty
Teknor Apex Mainstays Medium Duty
Companion 7169022
Craftsman 7169612
Teknor Apex Heavy Duty
Craftsman 7169212

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