

# How to Tell If an HVAC System Is a Heat Pump

Not sure if the HVAC system at a property is a heat pump or a traditional furnace setup? This quick reference guide walks you through a few key ways to tell the difference. While a visual inspection or operating test can usually provide a strong clue, it's important to know what you're looking for—and what common misconceptions to avoid. Use this step-by-step process when evaluating a system during an inspection.

## 1. CHECK FOR A REVERSING VALVE

Look inside the outdoor unit (preferably when it's off) to see if there's a reversing valve, typically a horizontal brass component with several lines connected. This is the most reliable way to confirm a heat pump, though it can be tricky if you're unfamiliar with HVAC components.

## 2. LOOK AT THE THERMOSTAT

If the thermostat includes settings like **Aux Heat** or **Emergency Heat**, it's likely a heat pump. However, thermostats can be incorrectly installed, so don't rely solely on this method.

## 3. OPERATE THE SYSTEM (WHEN IT'S BELOW 65°F)

- a. Turn off the thermostat and wait 2–3 minutes
- b. Switch to heating mode (not Aux or Emergency) and raise the set temperature by 1–2°F
- c. Step outside and listen. If the outdoor fan turns on, you're likely dealing with a heat pump

## 4. WATCH OUT FOR COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- The outdoor unit is a compressor, not automatically a heat pump. This gets confused often.
- A home can have both a heat pump and a gas furnace. Some setups use gas as backup heat.
- When in doubt, describe the system as "forced warm air" to avoid making incorrect assumptions.



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