



# Fork and Silver Guides and Templates

## Sterling Silver vs. Silver-Plated: Key Differences

**Composition:** **Sterling silver** is made of 92.5% pure silver and 7.5% other metals (usually copper), with silver running throughout the entire piece. **Silver-plated** items consist of a thin layer of silver coated over a base metal like nickel, brass, or copper.

**Durability:** **Sterling silver** is more durable than pure silver due to its alloy mixture, making it ideal for daily use and able to last for generations. **Silver-plated** items are less durable; the thin silver layer can wear off over time, especially with frequent use or harsh cleaning.

**Value:** **Sterling silver** holds high intrinsic value because of its significant silver content, which helps it retain value and be considered an investment. **Silver-plated** items have minimal intrinsic value and are generally only valued for their craftsmanship or aesthetic appeal, not for metal content.

**Markings:** **Sterling silver** is typically stamped with "Sterling," "925," or a country-specific hallmark such as a lion passant. **Silver-plated** items are often marked with "EP," "EPNS" (Electro-Plated Nickel Silver), or "Silverplate".

**Appearance & Wear:** **Sterling silver** tarnishes uniformly to a soft patina; deep scratches reveal the same silver alloy underneath and can be polished out. **Silver-plated** items may show uneven discoloration or flaking as the base metal is exposed with wear, with scratches revealing a different, often yellowish or reddish, metal underneath.

**Maintenance:** **Sterling silver** can be polished repeatedly to remove tarnish without damage. **Silver-plated** items require very gentle cleaning to avoid wearing away the thin silver layer; re-plating is needed to restore their appearance once the base metal shows.

### Identification Tips

- **Look for Hallmarks:** This is the easiest way to identify the type of silverware. Use a magnifying glass to check inconspicuous spots like the back of a spoon handle.
- **Weight and Sound:** Sterling silver often feels heavier and colder to the touch than plated items. When gently tapped, it produces a clear, lingering "ping" sound, unlike the dull "thud" of most plated items.
- **Magnet Test:** Silver is not magnetic. If a magnet strongly attracts the item, it is not solid silver (though some non-magnetic base metals are used in plating).
- **Tarnish Color:** Sterling silver tarnish is typically black or gray, while the discoloration on plated items might have purple, green, or blue chemical-like colors from the base metal.