

# How Much Do You Know About Your Septic System?

As a homeowner, you are responsible for maintaining your septic system. How much do you know about your septic? Take the following quiz to find out if you are septic savvy.



Exposed septic tank.

1. What happens to the solids and wastewater that go into a properly maintained septic tank?
  - A. Wastewater is held long enough for solids to settle and lighter particles to float.
  - B. Everything goes into the drainfield
  - C. Don't know
2. What are the warning signs of possible septic problems?
  - A. Slow draining fixtures
  - B. Plumbing backup
  - C. Squishy, smelly area in yard
  - D. All of the above
3. If your septic system fails, what may be the problem?
  - A. A pipe blockage
  - B. Clogged drainfield
  - C. Broken or crushed pipes
  - D. All of the above
4. Most septic tanks should be pumped:
  - A. Every 3 to 5 years
  - B. Every 10 to 15 years
  - C. Only when you move
5. What effects can a failing septic system have on the environment?
  - A. Contaminate drinking water sources
  - B. Cause disease outbreaks
  - C. Closure of shellfish harvesting areas
  - D. All of the above
6. If you use a garbage disposal, should your septic system be pumped more frequently?
  - A. No
  - B. Yes, twice as often
  - C. Don't know
7. What should not be put down the sink?
  - A. Coffee grounds
  - B. Grease, fats and oils
  - C. Egg shells
  - D. All of the above
8. Does the amount of water used (i.e. washing machines, dishwashers, showers, etc.) have an effect on septic tank efficiency?
  - A. No effect
  - B. Large effect
  - C. Don't know
9. What should not be flushed down the toilet?
  - A. Cat litter (including "flushable" brands)
  - B. Hair
  - C. Condoms and feminine products
  - D. All of the above
10. What can be planted on or near the drainfield?
  - A. Grass and other shallow-rooted plants
  - B. Trees and shrubs
  - C. Vegetables

## ANSWERS:

1. A - Wastewater stays in the tank long enough for solids to separate and settle (forming sludge) and grease and lighter particles to float (forming scum). Bacterial action partially decomposes some of the solids, which goes into the drainfield as effluent. Solids that are not decomposed remain in the tank.
2. D - Any of these can mean a problem with the septic system, contact a qualified septic professional.
3. D - The more common problems are with plumbing (such as pipe blockages from tree roots growing into the pipe) or clogging of the drainfield. Once the drainfield is clogged, it must be replaced and can cost thousands of dollars.
4. A - Most systems can be pumped every 3-5 years, others need pumping more frequently, depending on the size of the tank, number of people in the household, amount and type of solids.
5. D - A malfunctioning system can become a source of pollution and public health concern, causing property damage, ground and surface water pollution, and disease outbreaks.
6. B - Garbage disposal waste can build up quickly in a septic tank, and depending on usage, your septic may need pumping twice as often than if you don't use a disposal.
7. D - Coffee grounds, egg shells, grease, fats, and oils in the septic tank cause additional build up of sludge and scum, requiring the tank to be pumped more frequently.
8. B - The less water used, the less water entering the septic system. Using water efficiently can improve the operation of the system, reducing the risk of failure.
9. D - Only human waste and toilet paper should be flushed down the toilet.
10. A - Grass is the best planting over a drainfield. Trees and shrubs should be at least 50 feet away from the drainfield.