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## **Leach Field**

The life expectancy of a leach field can vary significantly based on several factors. Under normal conditions and with proper maintenance, a leach field can last 50 years or more. Some sources indicate that a well-built and well-maintained leach field should last between 20 to 25 years, but it may exceed 50 years with good care. The longevity of a leach field is influenced by proper installation, soil conditions, water table levels, system usage, and maintenance practices such as regular pumping and avoiding harsh chemicals. Conversely, neglect, improper installation, excessive water usage, vehicle traffic over the field, and invasive tree roots can drastically shorten its lifespan.

### **How do you know the leach field is failing?**

Have you noticed the area around your leach field is wet? This is just one of many indicators that there could be a leach field failure or a problem with your septic system as a whole.

**Below are 4 signs to look out for and what to do about it:**

#### **Sign #1: Ground Saturation or Puddles**

The purpose of a leach field (or sometimes called a drain field) is just that – wastewater should absorb into the soil and get broken down by bacteria.

So, one of the most obvious signs of a failed system is if the leach field or surrounding area is **wet, mushy, or even puddling**. This means the wastewater is not properly draining and there's an issue with the pipes or tank itself.

#### **Sign #2: Slow Drainage or Backup**

Have you noticed your **sinks, bathtubs, and toilets are draining more slowly** than normal or have stopped working entirely?

This could be another sign of a leach field malfunction. Keep in mind that slower drainage could happen for a number of other reasons, too, so be sure to consult a professional to determine the root cause.

#### **Sign #3: Excessive Grass Growth**

While **lush green grass** is typically something you want in your yard, when it's on the surface of your leach field, it's not exactly a good thing.

This could mean there's extra water and nutrients that are causing increased growth. And excess water in your leach field is never a good thing, and could mean your system isn't disposing of the wastewater as it should.

#### **Signs #4: Smelly Odors**

Of course, none of us wants **sewage odors** to permeate around our homes. These odors coming from your leach field, tank, or drain pipes are another sign there's a problem. A properly working septic system should dispose of these types of odors.

#### **Want to Prevent Leach Field Failure? Pump Your Tank.**

Did you know that one of the main causes of a leach field malfunction is not having your tank pumped on a regular basis? Like many other things in your home, your septic requires routine service and pumps (typically every 2-3 years).

#### **Can a PERC test predict a leach field that could be failing?**

A percolation (perc) test is primarily used to assess the suitability of soil for a new septic system by measuring how quickly water drains into the ground, which indicates the soil's ability to absorb and filter wastewater. While **the test is not typically used to diagnose an existing leach field's failure**, it can provide indirect evidence of problems. For instance, if a perc test is conducted on a property where a septic system is already installed and the soil shows significantly slower drainage than expected, it may suggest that the leach field is failing due to clogging or saturation.

However, a perc test is not a standard diagnostic tool for an operational system. Instead, signs of a failing leach field—such as pooling water, foul odors, or sewage backups—are more commonly identified through visual inspection or system performance monitoring. If a system is suspected of failing, a professional may recommend a perc test to evaluate the soil's current absorption capacity, especially if a new system or repair is being considered. In some cases, a test may be performed after clearing land to ensure that changes in the landscape, such as tree removal, have not altered the soil's drainage characteristics, although tree removal itself is not expected to affect the soil's percolation rate at the depth of the leach field.

Ultimately, while a perc test can help determine if the soil is capable of supporting a leach field, **it is not a direct method for diagnosing an existing field's failure**. For existing systems, other evaluation methods are more appropriate.

## **Septic Tank**

The recommended frequency for pumping a septic tank generally ranges from **every 3 to 5 years**, depending on household size, water usage, and system characteristics. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) advises pumping every 3 to 5 years to prevent sludge and scum buildup from entering the drainfield.

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) recommends pumping at least every 3 years for homes without a garbage disposal, and annually for homes with one, due to increased solid waste. The actual pumping schedule should be based on the sludge and scum levels measured during inspections, with pumping needed if the sludge layer is within 12 inches of the outlet or exceeds 25% of the liquid depth. Regular inspections, ideally every 1 to 3 years, are crucial to monitor system health and determine the appropriate pumping interval.

The frequency for pumping a septic tank, including those with a shared leach field, generally ranges from every 2 to 5 years, depending on household size and usage. While a common recommendation is to pump every 3 to 5 years, this can vary significantly; for instance, a single person might extend this interval to 7–10 years, whereas a family of 6 may require pumping every 2 years. Regular pumping is crucial to prevent solids from entering the leach field, which can lead to clogging and system failure, especially in shared systems where maintenance is critical for all users. It is advised to have the tank inspected and pumped every 2–3 years on average, with the exact timing influenced by the number of people using the system and the tank size.

## **Concrete Tank Replacement**

The life expectancy of a concrete septic tank typically ranges from **40 to 50 years** under proper installation and maintenance conditions. Some well-designed and well-built concrete systems can last as long as 100 years, particularly when not exposed to acidic soil or groundwater, which can accelerate deterioration. While the average lifespan is often cited as 40 years, factors such as soil acidity, ground movement, and regular maintenance significantly influence longevity. Concrete tanks are highly durable and resistant to corrosion and rust, making them a long-term investment compared to steel or plastic alternatives.