

Septic Inspection Checklist

Use this checklist to gather records, note visible warning signs, and discuss a septic inspection with a qualified professional. It is a preparation aid, not an inspection report or a guarantee of system condition. Download the blank PDF, print it out, or check items off as you go.

Homeowners: gather records and observe from a safe distance. Do not open or enter tanks, lean over openings, or handle electrical equipment. Leave tank access, measurements and component checks to a qualified septic professional. Keep children and pets away from damaged lids and surfaced sewage.

1. Prepare Records and Access

☐ **Locate septic tank**

Use your permit or system drawing to identify the tank and drain field for the inspector. Ask for help if the location is uncertain.

☐ **Arrange safe access with the inspector**

Ask what access preparation is needed. Move loose surface obstacles only where safe; leave digging and opening lids to the professional.

☐ **Note last pumping date**

Gather records of when the tank was last pumped. This helps the inspector assess sludge accumulation and pumping schedule adequacy.

☐ **Gather system records and permits**

Collect any available permits, installation records, repair history, and previous inspection reports. For a home purchase, compare the permit's approved bedroom count with the property's advertised use.

☐ **Check for recent plumbing issues**

Note any slow drains, gurgling sounds, sewage odors, or backups you have experienced. Report these to the inspector before they begin.

☐ **Note household size and water usage**

Record the number of people in the household and any high-water-use appliances. This helps the inspector evaluate whether the system is appropriately sized.

2. Ask the Professional About the Tank

☐ **Review tank condition with the inspector**

Ask which parts of the tank could be evaluated safely and have any access limits recorded in the report.

☐ **Ask about inlet and outlet baffles**

Ask the inspector whether the inlet and outlet baffles are intact and properly positioned to direct flow and keep solids in the tank.

☐ **Record the professional's sludge measurement**

Ask the professional to record sludge depth and recommend pumping based on the tank, outlet clearances and accumulated solids.

☐ **Record the professional's scum measurement**

Record the professional's scum measurement and pumping recommendation.

☐ **Ask about evidence of leaks**

Ask the inspector to record any evidence of water entering the tank or tank contents leaking out, along with recommended next steps.

☐ **Ask whether lids and risers are secure**

Ask the professional to assess lid and riser condition. Keep people away from damaged or missing covers.

3. Observe the Drain Field and Discuss Concerns

☐ **Observe the drain field from a safe area**

Note visible wet areas, odors or surface changes without entering wet or contaminated areas.

☐ **Check for standing water or odors**

Standing water or sewage odors over the drain field indicate potential failure. Note the location and extent of any wet areas.

☐ **Look for unusually green grass**

Patches of grass that are significantly greener or more lush than surrounding areas may indicate effluent surfacing and fertilizing the grass.

☐ **Ask about distribution-box condition**

Where the system has a distribution box, ask the professional whether its condition and flow could be evaluated.

☐ **Check for surface breakout**

Keep people and animals away from suspected sewage on the surface. Contact your local environmental health department and a qualified septic professional.

☐ **Note any vehicle traffic on field**

Vehicles, heavy equipment, or structures on the drain field compact the soil and damage pipes. Note any evidence of traffic or parking.

4. Record Findings and Follow-Up

☐ **Request written inspection report**

Always get a written report detailing findings, measurements, and the overall system condition. This is essential for real estate transactions and future reference.

☐ **Ask about recommended repairs**

If the inspector identifies issues, ask for specific repair recommendations, urgency level, and estimated costs.

☐ **Schedule next inspection date**

EPA recommends professional inspection at least every 3 years, generally annually for systems with mechanical components. Follow your permit and professional recommendations, which may require more frequent visits.

☐ **Get pumping schedule recommendation**

Based on sludge levels, household size, and tank capacity, ask the inspector to recommend an appropriate pumping frequency.

☐ **Save inspector contact info**

Keep the inspector's name, company, license number, and contact information with your system records for future reference.

Sources and Review Date

Sources checked September 26, 2026.

[EPA: How to Care for Your Septic System](#)

[NC State Extension: Septic System Owner's Guide](#)

[NC State Extension: Septic Systems and Their Maintenance](#)

[NC State Extension: Why Do Septic Systems Fail?](#)