

What’s in YOUR Water?
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There’s a popular credit card commercial out there that asks the question, “What’s in your wallet?” Granted, this is an important question (There’s not much in my wallet these days). But an even more important question might be what I’ve titled this article. Water quality is especially a concern for private well owners; individuals on public water lines benefit from municipal water systems having to meet water quality standards that require monitoring and treatment. The most common problems in Madison County for private well owners are related to disease causing bacteria and high mineral content which can cause issues with laundry, bathing, or cooking. But just because you have a private well does not mean that you have terribly dangerous water coming through your tap; water from wells in Georgia is generally quite safe without any need for treatment. Also, most of the problems associated with private wells are preventable and most others are at least manageable with water treatment, but the first step towards determining a course of action is water testing.

I would say the most important step in preventing water quality problems is proper well protection. This can involve several strategies. The first step is proper well placement. Wells should be upslope and away from septic systems and areas where surface runoff could collect around the well head. The well should also not sit in a flood prone area. Another important strategy is proper well construction. The well casing should be sealed with a tight fitting well cap or protected by a well house that will prevent vermin from entering the well. The well casing should also extend 1 to 2 feet above ground level along with a concrete slab surrounding the well. This will prevent surface water from running back down into the well and causing bacterial contamination. A third step to preventing problems is keeping contaminants away from your well. This includes keeping any type of chemical or fertilizer away from the well, never disposing of motor oil by pouring it on the ground, and not applying fertilizer or poultry litter near wells. If you have an abandoned well on your property, you should properly seal it to prevent materials from entering the well and therefore entering the groundwater.

If you have a private well, you should try to have your water tested at least annually. You should especially consider testing if your family regularly complains of gastrointestinal problems, you’re concerned about lead pipes or soldering in your home, your water has a strange color, odor, or taste or pipes show signs of corrosion or leaking, you are buying a new home with a well, or your water stains plumbing fixtures and laundry. The UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences provides water testing for many different parameters, including coliform bacteria, minerals, lead, nitrates, and even uranium and arsenic. Our office sends these samples off to the lab for testing and we also have samples bottles for you to use in collecting water for testing. If you’re concerned about testing your water but aren’t sure what you should test for, call us at the Extension office and we’ll be happy to help you find what’s in YOUR water (and what to do about it!).