



Let's Talk Toilets

By Dawn Frappier - Kitchen & Bath Gallery, Uxbridge

So, you want to know all about toilets. The first flush toilet was invented by John Harington in 1596. There is a lot of speculation floating around out there that Thomas Crapper invented the toilet. Sorry, but it's untrue. He did invent some items that improved the flush toilets performance, but most notably he brought toilets and other sanitary ware fixtures into the spotlight. He introduced the world to the first plumbing showroom. Without him, bathroom talk might still be taboo. Imagine how different our bathrooms may be today without those two.

Toilets come in a variety of different colors, shapes, and sizes. There are however some very important pieces of information you need to know before starting your toilet search. One is the toilet rough-in. Toilets come in 10", 12", or 14" rough-in. You can easily check your toilet rough-in by measuring from the center of the rear bolts that secure your toilet to the floor (you know those pesky plastic pieces that are always getting dirty, or the dog has run off with them completely and you have a rusty screw protruding from the floor) back to the wall. That should be close to either 10", 12", or 14". Another thing to consider is your bowl shape. Toilet bowls are available in an elongated (egg shape) or round front. Do you have baseboard heat behind your toilet? This will limit a lot of toilets available to you. Finally, what color are the fixtures in your bathroom? You can easily remove your bolt cap and bring that with you if you aren't sure exactly what shade of bone, biscuit, or almond you have in your bathroom. Now toilets come in all different styles, colors, bowl shapes, flush systems, and heights. These criteria all come into play when making your toilet selection.

Let's talk flush systems. Most toilets are gravity-assisted toilets. These are available in many different options. Pressure-assisted toilets have become a little more popular. They use air as well as water to flush the toilet. They will typically use less water to flush waste but are still only available in limited colors and bowl shapes. Most toilets flush 1.6 gpf (gallons per flush) or 1.28 gpf. There are some lower consumption toilets out there, but 1.28 gpf does a nice job removing waste, while cleaning the bowl. Dual flush toilets are also another option. Most models use 1.1 gpf for liquid waste and 1.6 gpf for solid waste removal. These toilets boast the greatest water savings. Gravity toilets will use a canister in the toilet tank to allow water to flow into the bowl through a series of jets in the toilet bowl. These jets not only force waste down the glazed trapway, but they wash down the bowl as well. The Corbelle toilet from Kohler also has the addition of "Clean Coat". This is a coating put on during the manufacturing process that prevents waste from sticking to the bowl. This keeps waste off the bowl and keeps the bowl cleaner longer.

There are other things to consider when consider toilet cleanability. The outside of the toilet can be just as difficult to clean. This is where the design of the toilet again comes into play. Toilets are available with exposed trapways (this is the part of the toilet that looks like a snake in which waste exits the toilet bowl and then out of our house.) Most toilets will have an exposed trapway. For those of us looking for something with less to wipe around there are concealed trapways. They have a smooth side that wipes down easily. Most will come with low profile bolt caps as well. Finally, there is the skirted toilet. These toilets tend to have a lot of design to them. While their sides are smooth they can be a little bulky, so I find most people either love them or leave them. They pair wonderfully with pedestal sinks and look great

in a half-bath. Since ease of cleaning has become such an important part of toilet purchasing, wall-mount toilets have become more popular than they have been in years past. While considered too modern for most bathrooms ten years ago, these toilets have simple clean lines, and use a concealed tank hidden in the wall to keep the toilet tank out of sight and out of mind. They also use dual flush to save water usage.

Now let's move on to comfort height versus standard height. Lately this is a hot topic. The introduction of the Squatty Potty® has changed the toilet world. Ten years ago, people wanted the tallest toilet they could find. Suddenly there was an influx of pinching issues (this is a seat issue as well not just a bowl shape issue) and dangling feet. People went from the "sitting on the floor" toilet from the 70's to a really tall toilet that really wasn't all that great for us. Toilets vary in height from about 15" to 19" tall. Most standard height toilets are about 15" or so with the seat and comfort height toilets are about 17" (with the seat). Comfort height is often compared to the height of a chair at your dining room table. The height of your toilet really depends on you. Like everything else there are pros and cons to each. If you have a knee or mobility issue, I would recommend the comfort height toilet. At just about 17" with the seat, your feet will still reach the ground, but you won't need to bend as far at the knee to reach the bowl. However, lately we have been reminded that the squatting position is better for us. A lot of us are tempted to choose the shorter toilet. Try the toilets out. Go back and forth between the two heights in the showroom and see which one feels best. Toilets are a long-lasting purchase. They don't tend to wear out so don't be shy. Have a seat and see what feels best. Speaking of seats, there are a lot of seat options out there. Slow closing seats that come off for easy cleaning, seats with a nightlight, deodorizing seats, and of course bidet-functionality seats. If you don't have the room for a bidet, a bidet seat can be a great addition to your toilet. These do have electrical requirements so check with your installer first.

Now moving onto bowl shapes. Toilets are typically going to be a round bowl or an elongated bowl. Round bowls are typically reserved for smaller spaces; however, they are also a more economical option because there is less toilet, about 3" or so. If you have had a round bowl for a long period of time, adjusting to an elongated bowl can take time. They feel different when in the seated position. Elongated bowls give the user more functional toilet space. If this is a toilet for a half-bath that guests will be using, it's a great idea to opt for the elongated bowl, and comfort height. If you don't have the space for an elongated bowl, consider a one-piece, compact-elongated toilet. One-piece toilets will save on floor space. One-piece toilets also lessen the opportunity for leaks between the tank and the bowl. If you are going to change your bathroom color every few years or so, a two-piece may be a little easier for you. Removing a one-piece toilet might be a strenuous job as they can be heavy. It might be easier for you to simply remove the tank on a two-piece toilet to change up that bathroom wall color every so often.

Lastly, let's talk about the look of the toilet. To some people a toilet has one job, to flush. If it's doing its job, that works for them. But, toilets come in a variety of styles and colors to compliment your bath décor. The color and style of the toilet can play the biggest role in the price of your toilet. When you add in one-piece versus two-piece pricing debates, toilet purchases can be bigger than you had anticipated. Remember the longevity of your toilet. They last for quite some time. They require maintenance within the tank just like your car. Toilet parts are typically readily available at your place of purchase. Since that toilet will be a part of your bathroom for many years, think about all aspects of the toilet and you will avoid any "toilet buyer's remorse". Happy Flushing!