

BT503 – ENVIRONMENTAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

FINAL TERM MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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GROUP LINK: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/BjC6W0jZx8o9yaC2ISh1Gu>

1. What is phytodegradation? Describe two modes through which it is carried out.

Phytodegradation is a type of phytoremediation where plants break down or chemically transform environmental pollutants into less harmful substances. This is achieved through the plant's metabolic processes and enzymes, or with the help of associated microorganisms, especially in the root zone (rhizosphere).

Two Modes Through Which Phytodegradation is Carried Out:

1. **Enzymatic Degradation Within the Plant (In Planta):**

In this mode, the plant absorbs the contaminants through its roots and then uses its own enzymes to degrade or modify the pollutants inside its tissues. These enzymes convert harmful compounds into less toxic or non-toxic forms, often incorporating them into plant biomass.

2. **Microbial-Assisted Degradation in the Rhizosphere:**

Here, the plant stimulates microbial activity in the soil around its roots (called the rhizosphere). These microbes produce enzymes that break down pollutants in the soil. The plant indirectly aids in the degradation by releasing nutrients and oxygen that support microbial communities.

2. What is the composition of gasoline?

Gasoline is a liquid fuel mainly composed of hydrocarbons (typically C4 to C12 range), refined from crude oil.

Main Components:

1. **Hydrocarbons:**

- **Alkanes (Paraffins):** 30–60%
- **Aromatics:** 25–40%
- **Cycloalkanes (Naphthenes):** 5–10%
- **Olefins (Alkenes):** 1–5%

2. **Additives:**

- **Antioxidants, detergents, anti-knock agents**
- **Oxygenates** like **ethanol** or **MTBE** to improve combustion and reduce emissions

3. Describe the transformation and reduction process of TNT. List three reduction products.

Transformation and Reduction Process of TNT:

TNT (2,4,6-trinitrotoluene) is a nitroaromatic explosive compound. In the environment, TNT undergoes transformation primarily through microbial and chemical reduction of its nitro groups ($-\text{NO}_2$) to amino groups ($-\text{NH}_2$).

Reduction Process:

- Microorganisms, especially in anaerobic conditions, use specific reductase enzymes to reduce the nitro groups on TNT.
- The stepwise reduction involves converting the nitro groups to nitroso ($-\text{NO}$), then to hydroxylamino ($-\text{NHOH}$), and finally to amino ($-\text{NH}_2$) groups.
- This process often occurs in the soil, sediment, or rhizosphere and leads to the formation of less toxic or immobilized compounds.

Three Main Reduction Products of TNT:

1. **2-Amino-4,6-dinitrotoluene (2-ADNT)**
2. **4-Amino-2,6-dinitrotoluene (4-ADNT)**
3. **2,4-Diamino-6-nitrotoluene (2,4-DANT)**

4. How does a plant-fungi relationship benefit plants? List three advantages.

A plant-fungi relationship, especially through mycorrhizal associations, is mutually beneficial. The fungi colonize plant roots and help improve the plant's growth and survival, particularly in nutrient-poor or stressed environments.

Three Advantages for Plants:

1. **Enhanced Nutrient Uptake:**
Mycorrhizal fungi increase the surface area of plant roots, improving the absorption of water and nutrients, especially phosphorus and nitrogen.
2. **Improved Resistance to Diseases and Stress:**
Fungi help protect plants from soil-borne pathogens and improve tolerance to drought, salinity, and heavy metals.
3. **Better Soil Structure and Root Growth:**
The fungal network helps in soil aggregation and stimulates root branching, promoting stronger and more extensive root systems.

5. Why bioenergy is considered a sustainable energy source? Explain the role of carbon in this process.

Bioenergy is considered a sustainable energy source because it is derived from biomass — organic materials like plants, crop residues, and animal waste — which can be replenished over a short time. Unlike fossil fuels, bioenergy helps maintain a balance in the carbon cycle.

Role of Carbon in Bioenergy:

1. **Carbon Neutrality:**

When plants grow, they absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. When biomass is later burned or decomposed for energy, it releases that same CO₂ back into the atmosphere. This creates a closed carbon cycle, making bioenergy carbon-neutral, at least in theory.

2. **Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions:**

Compared to fossil fuels, bioenergy generally produces lower net CO₂ emissions, especially when sourced sustainably and processed efficiently.

3. **Carbon Sequestration Potential:**

Some bioenergy systems (like those involving biochar or perennial energy crops) can even store carbon in soils, contributing to climate change mitigation.

6. What is the difference between natural and mechanical sludge dewatering processes?

Natural and mechanical sludge dewatering processes differ mainly in their methods, speed, and resource requirements. Natural dewatering relies on natural forces such as gravity, sunlight, and air to remove water from sludge. This process typically takes place in drying beds or lagoons and requires minimal energy, making it cost-effective but slow, often taking days or weeks to complete. It also needs large land areas and is more suitable for small-scale or rural wastewater treatment facilities. On the other hand, mechanical dewatering uses specialized equipment like centrifuges, belt filter presses, or screw presses to rapidly remove water from sludge. This method is much faster, often taking only a few hours, and requires electricity or fuel to operate. Although mechanical dewatering is more energy-intensive and expensive, it is highly efficient and requires less space, making it ideal for large-scale or urban treatment plants where quick processing and space-saving are important.

7. How are biosensors used to detect biocides in the environment? Give an example.

Biosensors detect biocides in the environment by combining a biological recognition element with a physical or chemical transducer. The biological component, such as enzymes, antibodies, or microorganisms, specifically interacts with the biocide (a substance that kills or inhibits harmful organisms). This interaction produces a measurable signal, which the transducer converts into an electrical, optical, or other readable output, allowing for sensitive and rapid detection of biocides in water, soil, or air.

Example: An enzyme-based biosensor using acetylcholinesterase can detect organophosphate pesticides, which are common biocides. When the pesticide inhibits the enzyme activity, the biosensor measures the change in signal, indicating the presence and concentration of the biocide in the sample.

8. What environmental factors affect bioremediation?

Several environmental factors influence the effectiveness of bioremediation by affecting the activity and growth of microorganisms responsible for breaking down pollutants. Key factors include:

1. **Temperature:** Microbial activity generally increases with temperature up to an optimum point. Extremely high or low temperatures can slow down or inhibit biodegradation.
2. **pH:** Most microbes prefer neutral to slightly alkaline conditions (pH 6-8). Acidic or highly alkaline environments can reduce microbial efficiency.
3. **Oxygen Availability:** Aerobic microbes need oxygen to degrade many pollutants, while anaerobic microbes work in oxygen-free conditions. The type of pollutant often determines which microbial processes are effective.
4. **Nutrient Levels:** Adequate amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and other nutrients are essential to support microbial growth and metabolism.
5. **Moisture Content:** Water is necessary for microbial life, so soil or sediment moisture affects biodegradation rates.
6. **Toxicity of Pollutants:** High concentrations of toxic substances can inhibit microbial populations.
7. **Bioavailability of Pollutants:** Pollutants must be accessible to microbes; if they are tightly bound to soil or sediment particles, degradation slows down.

9. What are the initial steps in solid waste management?

The initial steps in solid waste management involve activities that help in handling waste efficiently from its generation to final disposal. These steps include:

1. **Waste Generation:** This is the point where waste is created in households, industries, commercial areas, or institutions.
2. **Waste Segregation:** Sorting waste at the source into different categories like organic, recyclable, hazardous, and inert waste to facilitate proper handling.
3. **Collection:** Gathering the segregated waste using manual or mechanical methods and transporting it to processing or disposal sites.
4. **Transportation:** Moving the collected waste efficiently and safely from the collection points to treatment or disposal facilities.

10. List the advantages of using biodiesel.

1. **Renewable and Sustainable:** Biodiesel is made from renewable resources like vegetable oils and animal fats, making it more sustainable than fossil fuels.
2. **Reduced Emissions:** It produces lower levels of harmful emissions such as carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and unburned hydrocarbons, helping reduce air pollution.
3. **Biodegradable and Non-toxic:** Biodiesel breaks down more easily in the environment and is less toxic compared to petroleum diesel.
4. **Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Using biodiesel helps lower net carbon dioxide emissions because the carbon released was recently absorbed by plants during growth.

5. **Compatibility:** Biodiesel can be used in existing diesel engines with little or no modification.
6. **Energy Security:** It reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels by using locally available feedstocks.
7. **Lubricity:** Biodiesel improves engine lubrication, which can reduce engine wear and prolong engine life.

11. What is phytoremediation? Explain two of its modes.

Phytoremediation is an environmentally friendly, cost-effective technique that uses plants to clean up contaminated soil, water, or air by removing, degrading, or stabilizing pollutants.

Two Common Modes of Phytoremediation:

1. **Phytoextraction:**
Plants absorb contaminants, mainly heavy metals, from the soil through their roots and accumulate them in their shoots and leaves. These plants can then be harvested and safely disposed of, removing pollutants from the site.
2. **Phytodegradation (Phytotransformation):**
Plants break down organic pollutants within their tissues through metabolic processes, often aided by enzymes. This mode transforms harmful chemicals into less toxic or harmless substances.

12. What analysis and factors should be considered before treating wastewater?

Before treating wastewater, several analyses and factors must be considered to design an effective treatment system:

Key Analyses:

- **Physical Analysis:** Suspended solids (SS), Temperature, Turbidity
- **Chemical Analysis:** pH, Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), Nutrients (Nitrogen, Phosphorus), Toxic substances and heavy metals
- **Microbiological Analysis:** Presence of pathogens like bacteria, viruses, and parasites

Factors to Consider:

1. **Wastewater Source:** Industrial, domestic, or agricultural, as this affects pollutant type and concentration.
2. **Pollutant Concentration and Composition:** Determines treatment method and complexity.
3. **Flow Rate and Variability:** Influences sizing and capacity of treatment units.
4. **Regulatory Standards:** Local environmental discharge limits and reuse criteria.
5. **Economic and Technical Feasibility:** Cost, available technology, and operational expertise.
6. **Environmental Impact:** Potential effects of treated effluent on receiving water bodies or land.

13. Explain the biodegradation process of Atrazine.

Biodegradation of Atrazine involves the breakdown of this herbicide by microorganisms in the soil or water, transforming it into less harmful compounds.

Process Overview:

1. **Microbial Action:** Certain bacteria (e.g., *Pseudomonas*, *Arthrobacter*) possess enzymes that can degrade atrazine by using it as a carbon or nitrogen source.
2. **Initial Breakdown:** The key step is the hydrolysis of the chlorine atom on the atrazine molecule, leading to the formation of hydroxyatrazine, which is less toxic.
3. **Further Metabolism:** Hydroxyatrazine is further broken down into simpler compounds like cyanuric acid, ammonia, carbon dioxide, and water through a series of enzymatic reactions.
4. **Complete Mineralization:** In some cases, microorganisms fully mineralize atrazine, converting it into harmless end products, thus removing it from the environment.

14. List three applications of biosensors using optical transducers.

Three applications of biosensors using optical transducers are:

1. **Detection of Pathogens:** Optical biosensors can quickly identify bacteria or viruses in water, food, or clinical samples by detecting specific biomolecular interactions.
2. **Monitoring Environmental Pollutants:** They are used to detect contaminants such as pesticides, heavy metals, or biocides in soil and water with high sensitivity.
3. **Medical Diagnostics:** Optical biosensors help measure glucose levels, hormone concentrations, or other biomarkers in blood or bodily fluids for disease diagnosis and management.

15. List the measures for off-site disposal of solid waste.

Measures for off-site disposal of solid waste include:

1. **Sanitary Landfilling:** Disposing waste in engineered landfills designed to prevent contamination of soil and groundwater.
2. **Incineration:** Burning waste at high temperatures to reduce volume and sometimes generate energy.
3. **Transfer Stations:** Temporary sites where waste is collected and then transported in bulk to disposal or treatment facilities.
4. **Recycling Centers:** Facilities where recyclable materials are separated and processed for reuse.
5. **Composting Facilities:** Off-site locations where organic waste is biologically decomposed into compost.
6. **Waste-to-Energy Plants:** Facilities that convert waste materials into usable energy, such as electricity or heat.

16. Define phytoplankton.

Phytoplankton are microscopic, photosynthetic organisms found in aquatic environments such as oceans, lakes, and rivers. They form the base of the aquatic food web by producing oxygen and organic matter through photosynthesis, supporting a wide range of marine and freshwater life.

17. How is glycine formed?

Glycine is formed biologically through several pathways, but the most common natural formation occurs via:

1. **Serine Hydroxymethyltransferase Reaction:**

Glycine is synthesized from the amino acid serine by the enzyme serine hydroxymethyltransferase. In this reaction, serine loses a hydroxymethyl group ($-\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$), which is transferred to tetrahydrofolate, converting serine into glycine.

2. **Non-biological Synthesis:**

Glycine can also be chemically synthesized by the Strecker synthesis, where formaldehyde, hydrogen cyanide, and ammonia react to form glycine.

18. Name the three phases present in a submerged aerated biofilter.

The three phases present in a submerged aerated biofilter are:

1. **Solid phase:** The biofilm that grows on the filter media, composed of microorganisms responsible for biodegradation.
2. **Liquid phase:** The wastewater or polluted water flowing through the filter.
3. **Gas phase:** The air or oxygen supplied to support aerobic microbial activity within the biofilter.

19. Name three major sources of dioxin production.

Three major sources of dioxin production are:

1. **Combustion processes:** such as waste incineration, forest fires, and burning of fossil fuels.
2. **Chemical manufacturing:** especially in the production of herbicides and pesticides.
3. **Metal smelting and refining:** processes that release dioxins as by-products.

20. What factors affect the suitability of in situ and ex situ bioremediation techniques?

Factors affecting the suitability of in situ and ex situ bioremediation techniques include:

1. **Contaminant Type and Concentration:**

In situ is suitable for low to moderate contamination; ex situ is better for highly contaminated sites.

2. **Soil Characteristics:**

In situ works well in permeable soils allowing microbial activity; ex situ is preferred when soils are impermeable or heavily compacted.

3. **Site Accessibility and Size:**

In situ is ideal for large or difficult-to-access sites; ex situ requires excavation and transport, so better for smaller or manageable sites.

4. **Time Frame:**

Ex situ methods generally act faster; in situ may take longer but cause less disturbance.

5. **Cost and Infrastructure:**

In situ is usually less expensive due to minimal excavation; ex situ requires more equipment and operational costs.

6. **Environmental Impact:**

In situ causes less disruption and preserves site integrity; ex situ involves excavation, which can impact the environment.

21. List three factors involved in algal association with plants.

Three factors involved in algal association with plants are:

1. **Nutrient Exchange:** Algae can provide plants with nutrients like nitrogen through fixation or mineralization, enhancing plant growth.
2. **Protection:** Algal association can help protect plants from pathogens or harsh environmental conditions by producing bioactive compounds.
3. **Habitat Formation:** Algae can create a microenvironment around plant roots or surfaces that supports beneficial microbial communities and improves soil structure.

22. Name the most common metallic coagulants used in sludge dewatering.

The most common metallic coagulants used in sludge dewatering are:

1. **Aluminum Sulfate (Alum)**
2. **Ferric Chloride**
3. **Ferrous Sulfate**

23. List the different levels of wastewater.

The different levels or types of wastewater are typically classified based on their source and characteristics:

1. **Domestic Wastewater:** From households, including sewage and greywater.
2. **Industrial Wastewater:** Generated from industrial processes, often containing specific chemical pollutants.
3. **Storm water Runoff:** Water from rain or melting snow that collects pollutants from surfaces.
4. **Agricultural Wastewater:** From farming activities, including runoff containing fertilizers, pesticides, and animal waste.
5. **Mixed Wastewater:** Combination of domestic, industrial, and sometimes stormwater.

24. What are the effects of polychlorinated p-dioxins on human health?

Polychlorinated p-dioxins (PCDDs) are highly toxic environmental pollutants that can have serious health effects on humans, including:

1. **Cancer:** Dioxins are classified as human carcinogens and can increase the risk of various cancers.
2. **Reproductive and Developmental Problems:** Exposure can lead to birth defects, developmental delays, and reduced fertility.
3. **Immune System Suppression:** Dioxins can weaken the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections.
4. **Endocrine Disruption:** They interfere with hormone functions, affecting growth and metabolism.
5. **Skin Disorders:** Prolonged exposure can cause chloracne, a severe skin condition.

25. Why does the biodegradation of detergents face challenges? Give two reasons.

The biodegradation of detergents faces challenges mainly due to:

1. **Presence of Synthetic Surfactants:** Many detergents contain synthetic surfactants that are resistant to microbial breakdown because of their complex chemical structure.
2. **Toxic Ingredients:** Some detergents include additives or chemicals that are toxic to microorganisms, inhibiting their ability to degrade the compounds effectively.

26. What factors affect the biodegradability of organic compounds?

Factors affecting the biodegradability of organic compounds include:

1. **Chemical Structure:** Simple, linear molecules biodegrade more easily than complex, branched, or aromatic compounds. Presence of certain functional groups (e.g., halogens) can hinder degradation.
2. **Molecular Size:** Smaller molecules are generally more biodegradable than large, complex ones.
3. **Solubility:** Water-soluble compounds are more accessible to microorganisms and thus degrade faster.
4. **Environmental Conditions:** Factors like temperature, pH, oxygen availability, and nutrient levels influence microbial activity and biodegradation rates.
5. **Toxicity:** Compounds toxic to microbes can inhibit biodegradation.
6. **Bioavailability:** How easily microorganisms can access the compound affects its degradation; tightly bound or adsorbed pollutants degrade slower.

27. What is glyphosate?

Glyphosate is a widely used herbicide that kills unwanted plants by inhibiting an enzyme essential for their growth. It is effective against many types of weeds and is commonly applied in agriculture and gardening for weed control.

28. What natural processes help remove pathogenic organisms?

Natural processes that help remove pathogenic organisms include:

1. **Sunlight (UV Radiation):** Exposure to sunlight can kill or inactivate many pathogens in water and on surfaces.
2. **Predation:** Natural predators like protozoa and other microorganisms consume pathogenic bacteria.
3. **Sedimentation:** Pathogens can settle out of water with suspended particles and get trapped in sediments.
4. **Biodegradation:** Microorganisms break down organic matter, including pathogens, reducing their numbers.
5. **Natural Filtration:** Soil and sand filter water as it percolates, trapping and removing pathogens.

29. How are pollutants classified in environmental studies?

In environmental studies, pollutants are commonly classified based on their:

1. **Source:**
 - *Point source pollutants* (from a specific, identifiable location like a factory)
 - *Non-point source pollutants* (diffuse sources like agricultural runoff)

2. Nature or State:

- *Physical pollutants* (e.g., heat, noise, radiation)
- *Chemical pollutants* (e.g., heavy metals, pesticides, acids)
- *Biological pollutants* (e.g., bacteria, viruses, invasive species)

3. Persistence:

- *Persistent pollutants* (remain in the environment for a long time, like dioxins)
- *Non-persistent pollutants* (break down quickly)

4. Effect:

- *Toxic pollutants* (harmful to living organisms)
- *Nutrient pollutants* (cause eutrophication, like nitrogen and phosphorus)
- *Aesthetic pollutants* (affect appearance, odor, or taste)

30. What is the difference between persistence and mobility of pollutants?

Persistence and mobility are two important properties of pollutants that affect how they behave in the environment:

- **Persistence** refers to how long a pollutant remains in the environment without breaking down. Persistent pollutants resist natural degradation processes and can stay in soil, water, or air for years, leading to long-term contamination.
- **Mobility** describes how easily a pollutant can move through the environment, such as through soil, water, or air. Highly mobile pollutants can spread quickly from their source to other areas, potentially contaminating a wider region.

31. Name a key factor to consider when selecting a wastewater treatment method.

A key factor to consider when selecting a wastewater treatment method is the pollutant concentration and composition in the wastewater. This determines the type and extent of treatment required to effectively remove contaminants.

32. Define biotechnology and list its applications.

Biotechnology is the use of living organisms, cells, or biological systems to develop products and technologies that improve human life and the environment.

Applications of Biotechnology:

1. **Healthcare:** Development of vaccines, antibiotics, and gene therapy.
2. **Agriculture:** Creation of genetically modified crops for better yield and pest resistance.
3. **Environmental Management:** Bioremediation of pollutants and waste treatment.
4. **Industrial Processes:** Production of biofuels, enzymes, and biodegradable plastics.
5. **Food Industry:** Fermentation processes for products like yogurt, cheese, and alcohol.

33. How are animals used as bioindicators in environmental monitoring? Give two examples.

Animals are used as bioindicators in environmental monitoring because they can reflect the health of their ecosystems and reveal the presence of pollutants or changes in environmental conditions. For example:

1. **Amphibians (like frogs)** are sensitive to changes in water quality and pollutants, so a decline in their population can indicate pollution or habitat degradation.
2. **Mollusks (such as mussels)** accumulate heavy metals and toxins in their tissues, providing information about contamination levels in aquatic environments.

34. What are maturation ponds, and what is their purpose in wastewater treatment?

Maturation ponds are large, shallow ponds used in wastewater treatment as a final step after primary and secondary treatment. Their main purpose is to further improve the quality of treated wastewater by removing pathogens (like bacteria and viruses) through natural processes such as sunlight exposure, microbial activity, and sedimentation. They also help reduce nutrients and organic matter, making the water safer for discharge or reuse.

35. What is the main purpose of biodiscs in wastewater treatment?

The main purpose of biodiscs in wastewater treatment is to promote the growth of microorganisms on rotating discs that partially immerse in wastewater. These microorganisms biologically break down organic pollutants in the water. Biodiscs provide an efficient aerobic treatment process by ensuring good oxygen transfer and microbial contact with the wastewater, resulting in effective removal of organic matter.

36. List the three main types of environmental biotechnology interventions.

The three main types of environmental biotechnology interventions are:

1. **Bioremediation:** Using microorganisms or plants to clean up contaminated soils, water, and air.
2. **Wastewater Treatment:** Biological processes to treat sewage and industrial effluents.
3. **Bioenergy Production:** Generating energy from biological sources like biomass, biogas, and biofuels.

37. What are recombinant microorganisms, particularly bacteria and yeast?

Recombinant microorganisms are genetically engineered bacteria or yeast that have had foreign DNA inserted into their genomes to give them new abilities.

- **Recombinant bacteria** are commonly used to produce proteins like insulin, antibiotics, and enzymes by inserting genes from other organisms.
- **Recombinant yeast** are used in biotechnology for producing vaccines, biofuels, and pharmaceuticals by expressing desired genes.

38. What are cDNA libraries?

cDNA libraries are collections of complementary DNA (cDNA) sequences that are synthesized from messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules extracted from cells or tissues. They represent the actively expressed genes at the time of RNA extraction. These libraries are used to study gene expression, clone genes, and analyze protein-coding sequences because cDNA corresponds only to expressed genes without introns.

39. How is bio-waste used in Short Rotation Coppice (SRC)?

In Short Rotation Coppice (SRC), bio-waste like agricultural residues, wood chips, or organic waste can be used as organic fertilizers or soil amendments to improve soil fertility and support the growth of fast-growing trees or shrubs (such as willow or poplar). This enhances biomass production for energy purposes while recycling nutrients back into the soil.

40. Using a named example, describe how a whole organism can be used to measure the biological toxicity of water or soil.

A common example is using *Daphnia magna*, a small freshwater crustacean, to assess water toxicity. Because *Daphnia* are highly sensitive to pollutants, exposing them to water samples helps measure toxicity by observing their survival, reproduction, or mobility over time. Reduced survival or impaired movement indicates the presence of toxic substances in the water. This whole-organism bioassay provides an integrated response to complex mixtures of contaminants, making it a practical tool for environmental monitoring of water and soil toxicity.

Disclaimer:

For best results, it is advised NOT to rely on this file only. Go through video lectures, handouts and other sources as well.

*Regards,
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