

Septic Maintenance

Do's & Don'ts

Septic System Do's

Spread laundry use over the week rather than many loads on one day. While it might be convenient to do so, dedicating an entire day to do laundry will put a severe strain on your septic system. All this water does not let the sediments rise or settle in the tank. The water goes in and out too fast. The sediment stays suspended in the water and is then drained into your leach field. This is where the sediment starts to plug the absorption ability of the ground causing temporary septic flooding, then total failure. This rush of water does not give the bacteria time to break down the waste which is in the septic tank. Space out your laundry loads and wash full loads. The average load of laundry uses 47 gallons of water. One load per day rather than 7 loads on Saturday makes a big difference to your septic tank. Also, front loading washers use less water than top loaders

- Repair any leaking faucets and toilets promptly. One barely audible toilet leak can run 150+ gallons of water a day (4,500 gal. a month) into your septic system, a leaky faucet, one gallon+ a day. This also creates a constant water in and out situation where sediment does not get to settle or rise
- You can dye test the toilet often to check for leaks in the septic system by putting several drops of food coloring in the toilet tank. If there is a leak, the color will bleed into the toilet bowl
- Use water-conserving devices where possible. Low flush toilets and shower heads are commonly available. Install low usage water fixtures. Showerheads (2.5 gallons/minute), toilets (1.6 gallons), dishwashers (5.3 gallons), and washing machines (14 gallons). By installing fixtures such as these, the average family can reduce the amount of water entering the septic system by 20,000 gallons per year
- Use liquid laundry detergent. Most powdered laundry detergents use clay or hulls as a carrier. This clay can hasten the buildup of solids in the septic tank and potentially plug the disposal area
- Minimize the amount of household cleaners (bleach, harsh cleansers) and similar toxic substances. Detergents, kitchen waste, laundry waste, and household chemicals in

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normal amounts do not affect the proper operation of household sewage treatment systems; however, excessive quantities can be harmful (killing the bacteria)

- Make a permanent record of where the key parts of your septic system are located for future maintenance (i.e. septic pumping service or field repairs)
- Have septic pumping service regularly. The contents of the septic tank should be pumped every two to three years or when the total depth of sludge and scum exceeds one-third of the liquid depth of the tank. If the tank is not cleaned periodically, small particles can be carried into the absorption field (leach field). and premature failure follows, and the absorption field must be replaced. Pumping your septic tank is less expensive than replacing your leach field. Keep records of septic pumping service and septic system maintenance
- Check any pumps, siphons, or other moving parts of your system regularly
- Remove or prevent trees with large root systems growing near the leach field. Don't plant trees around your leach field. Roots from trees in the immediate area of the absorption lines may clog the system
- Run water regularly in seldom used drains such as sinks, tubs, showers, etc. to avoid noxious gases from building up and causing odors inside
- Roof, cellar, foundation drainage, and surface water must be excluded from the system. Drainage water can be discharged to the ground surface without treatment. Make sure it drains away from your sewage treatment system. Roof downspouts should not drain toward the leach field
- Water runoff from hills and inclines should be diverted away from the absorption field
- Keep your septic tank cover accessible for tank inspections and pumping
- Keep your septic tank cover secured so children can not remove it.
- Keep swimming pools (above or in-ground) away from the leach field

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- Have your effluent screen (inside your tank where waste water leaves) inspected and cleaned once a year
- Install a lint trap at the clothes washer drain

Septic System Don'ts

- Avoid garbage disposals. Garbage grinders substantially increase the accumulation of solids in the septic tank, as well as the solids entering the leach fields. Their disadvantages far outweigh the convenience they provide and are not recommended for households with their own sewage treatment systems. If used, the septic tank size should be increased. If you use a garbage disposal, pump more frequently. Disposals lead to buildup of grease, especially from meat and bones, and insoluble vegetable solids
- A few things (not a complete list) that should never go into the septic tank and leach fields
 - Cigarette butts, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins & tampons,
 - Pop-off toilet wand scrubbers, trash, condoms, hair, bandages, rags & strings, coffee grounds, paper towels
 - Plastic or metallic objects
 - Paint and varnish: these chemicals will seal the walls of your absorption field leading to septic system failure
 - Gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, paint thinners
 - Hard toilet paper – soft is better for the tank
 - Anti-bacterial soaps – use biodegradable soaps
 - Dead fish or small animals

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- Avoid dirt and inert products. Dirt laden clothes, fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms should be dusted off before washing them
- Don't use chlorine and chemicals in excess – (1-part chlorine & 5 parts water is a good spray bacterium cleaner) vinegar solution is the same as bleach
- Just because it says flushable does not mean it is: example; flushable towelettes; hand, facial, and bottom wipes, flushable cat litter
- Use bio degradable shampoo and conditioners
- Keep kitchen greases OUT of the septic system. It is not easily broken down and can clog your drain field. There are no available solvents to dissolve these oils that are legal to the groundwater
- Septic tank additives are not recommended, these additives are unnecessary for the proper operation of household systems. Those which advertise that they will remove solids from your tank usually do not. The solids exit the tank and end up in the leach field, the solids seal the absorption ability of the ground (like a ring around a tub), and the system malfunctions. There is no reason to jumpstart the system with additives, whereas normal human waste contains enough bacteria for the septic tank, and other microbes are already present in the soil of the leach field
- Do not flush cat feces down the toilet since it has hair, and the feces may contain toxoplasmosis, a parasite that can harm wildlife. The septic system or city sewage cannot destroy the parasite
- Do not dispose beer brewery residual into septic system

SAFTEY FIRST!!

NEVER physically enter a septic tank or other parts of the treatment system There are noxious gases that can kill quickly or render you unconscious, and you may fall into the tank