

Your Septic System

The Basics

A septic system allows solids to settle within a tank and wastewater to drain to a drainfield and be absorbed by the subsurface soil. Proper treatment and disposal of sewage from a septic tank and drainfield system requires that the soil be suitable to treat and dispose of large quantities of wastewater before it reaches the groundwater. Soils must undergo a very careful physical evaluation and or testing prior to health department approval. Contact your local health department for more detailed information on your system and the soils that your system relies on for proper treatment and disposal of sewage.

Over time, the septic drainfield absorbs hundreds of thousands of gallons of sewage effluent and will last many years if properly maintained. A malfunction of a septic system may be expensive and offensive, potentially resulting in a backup of sewage in the toilets and drains of your house and sewage effluent ponding on the surface of your drainfield or both. Health risks to humans caused by direct exposure to improperly treated sewage are numerous. It is important to take care of your sewage disposal system to prevent serious diseases, save on the high costs of untimely repairs, and prevent further contamination of surface water and groundwater.

Taking Care of Your Septic System

Plantings

A good vegetative cover should be maintained over the system. It is important to protect the surface from any erosion since the drainfield lines are often within two feet of the ground surface. Herbaceous, shallow rooted plants, such as flowering perennials and annuals, turf grass and many groundcovers are unlikely to damage the lines. In addition the vegetation will help remove excess water. It is also important to note that roots from nearby trees or shrubs may clog and damage your drain lines.

Practice Water Conservation

Household water use directly controls how quickly waste travels through the system. Too much water moving too fast through the septic system does not give the helpful bacteria time to break down the solids. This is why it is important to repair dripping faucets and leaking toilets as well as running washing machines and dishwashers only when full. You can also conserve water by installing water saving features in faucets, showerheads and toilets.

Control What Goes Down the Drain

Controlling what goes into the water that enters the septic system is just as important as reducing the quantity of water that flows into the system. A septic system is dependent on a balance of "good" bacteria and solids to work properly. Avoid using excessive amounts of chlorine bleach and other chemicals. These are helpful around the home for cleaning and disinfecting but will wipe out the helpful bacteria in your system which are vital for breaking down waste. Non-degradable such as grease, disposable diapers, plastics and chemicals such as gasoline, oil, paint thinner and antifreeze should be kept out of your septic system.