

Septic System Dos and Don'ts

Do

- ...educate your family on proper use of the system.
- ...repair leaky faucets and toilets. One leaky faucet can waste as much as 700 gallons of water a year.
- ...use low-flow fixtures.
- ...spread out your laundry over several days to give the septic system more time to digest the water.
- ...run dishwashers and clothes washers only when full and use the cycle with the lowest number of rinses.
- ...use baking soda and white vinegar to clean toilets and other household items rather than harsh chemical cleaners.
- ...use boiling water or a mechanical drain snake to clear blocked drains. Drain cleaners contain dangerous chemicals that can destroy the septic system's beneficial bacteria.
- ...direct all wastewater from your home into the septic tank. This includes all sink, bath, shower, toilet, washing machine and dishwasher wastewaters. Any of these waters can contain disease-causing microorganisms or pollutants.
- ...install a manhole to simplify inspection and cleaning, if the tank is 3-4 ft. below ground level.
- ...allow only grass to grow on top of the tank and leaching field.
- ...ensure that there is a vegetated buffer (grass, trees and shrubs) between your leaching field and a lake or stream. Plants will suck up excess nutrients, help retain water, and prevent erosion.
- ...keep roof drains, surface water from driveways, basement sump pump drains, and other drainage systems away from the leaching field.
- ...check with the local regulatory agency before installing a water softener that discharges to the septic system.
- ...find your flow diversion valve and turn it once a year. This can add years to the life of your system.

Don't

- ...put a lot of water into the system all at once. A lot of water down the drain like when draining a bathtub can force harmful amounts of nutrients to flow from the tank and overwhelm the leach field.
- ...flush even small amounts of paint, solvent, thinners, disinfectants, pesticides, or oils down the drain or toilet. These chemicals can destroy the bacteria that break down solids in the septic tank and pollute groundwater.
- ...use large amounts of laundry soap, detergents, bleaches, toilet bowl cleaners and caustic drain cleaners. Choose environmentally friendly products (such as Method or Seventh Generation) or vinegar and baking soda whenever possible. If you must use chemical cleaners, read labels carefully to ensure only recommended amounts are applied.
- ...allow excess amounts of fat or grease to enter the system. It can congeal and cause obstructions.
- ...use garbage disposals. Compost instead.
- ...flush paper towels, tampons or sanitary napkins, condoms, plastic, or cat litter.
- ...use chemical compounds, enzymes or septic tank "cleaners." These can break down sludge, which can then flow into your leaching field, decreasing the life of the field.
- ...discharge salt brine solution from water softeners. Salt brine can build up in the groundwater and pollute wells and springs supplying drinking water.
- ...use matches or an open flame to inspect a septic tank. Gases produced by decomposing sewage can explode and cause serious injury.
- ...allow trucks or heavy equipment to drive or park over the tank or leaching field. Heavy equipment can crush the pipes and compact the soil so it can no longer filter and absorb sewage nutrients.
- ...plant trees or shrubs on or near the leaching field. Trees such as willows, poplar and sumac can clog up your tile bed and cause backup and surface seepage.