

Septic System Preventative Maintenance for Homeowners

Septic systems are designed and installed with the intent of balancing installation costs with the time of useful drain field life. Each drain field has a unique ability to absorb effluent (liquid waste discharge), depending upon the following four factors:

1. Site conditions including soil, bedrock, and groundwater.
2. Engineering design capacity.
3. Installation techniques and materials.
4. The use history of your drain field.

THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF EARLY SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURE IS HOMEOWNER MISUSE! Septic tanks do not capture all solids and precipitates. Some materials enter your drain field and gradually plug it. Your drain field's capacity to absorb effluent will progressively decrease with use. At some future date, your drain field's ability to absorb will drop below the volume of effluent your home produces. Effluent will surface in "spring-like" fashion on top of or downhill from your drain field. When effluent surfacing occurs, your drain field will need to be replaced at a very high cost. By exercising the following common-sense precautions, a smart homeowner will substantially postpone expensive drain field replacement:

1. Paint, turpentine, motor oil, antifreeze, etc., should be disposed of separately in emptied chlorine bleach or other containers. One careless painter plugged his new drain field in one year by cleaning his paint brushes in the sink.
2. Wipe out greasy pans with paper towels before placing the pan in your dishwasher to avoid grease precipitation in field.
3. Garbage disposal systems should be avoided. Use the sink strainer to catch solids. Garbage, cigarette butts, tampons, and cotton go in the trash.
4. Use baking soda and vinegar to unplug toilets and drains.
5. Never release bath salts or bath oils into your septic system. Install a separate disposal field for water softener filter saltwater disposal. Salts and oils kill septic tank bacteria, dissolve septic tank concrete, emulsify feces, and prevent earthworms from inhabiting your drain field. Bacteria and earthworms ecologically consume organic plugging materials.
6. Minimize chlorine bleach in your laundry. Don't pour anti-bacterial medicines or germicides down the sink. Don't kill bacteria that break down harmful long-chain hydrocarbons into harmless gases and liquids, preventing drain field plugging.
7. Have your septic tank pumped at two year intervals or when a probe reveals six inches of bottom sludge in the upstream compartment of your septic tank. Install risers or place sand or pea gravel on top of septic tank lids for easy access.
8. Plant grass – not trees and bushes on the drain field. Remove trees to prevent plugging of distribution lines by roots.
9. Do not drive across you drain field. Fence off drain field from livestock. Your drain field will compact from the surface downward, crushing pipes and reducing absorption capacity.

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