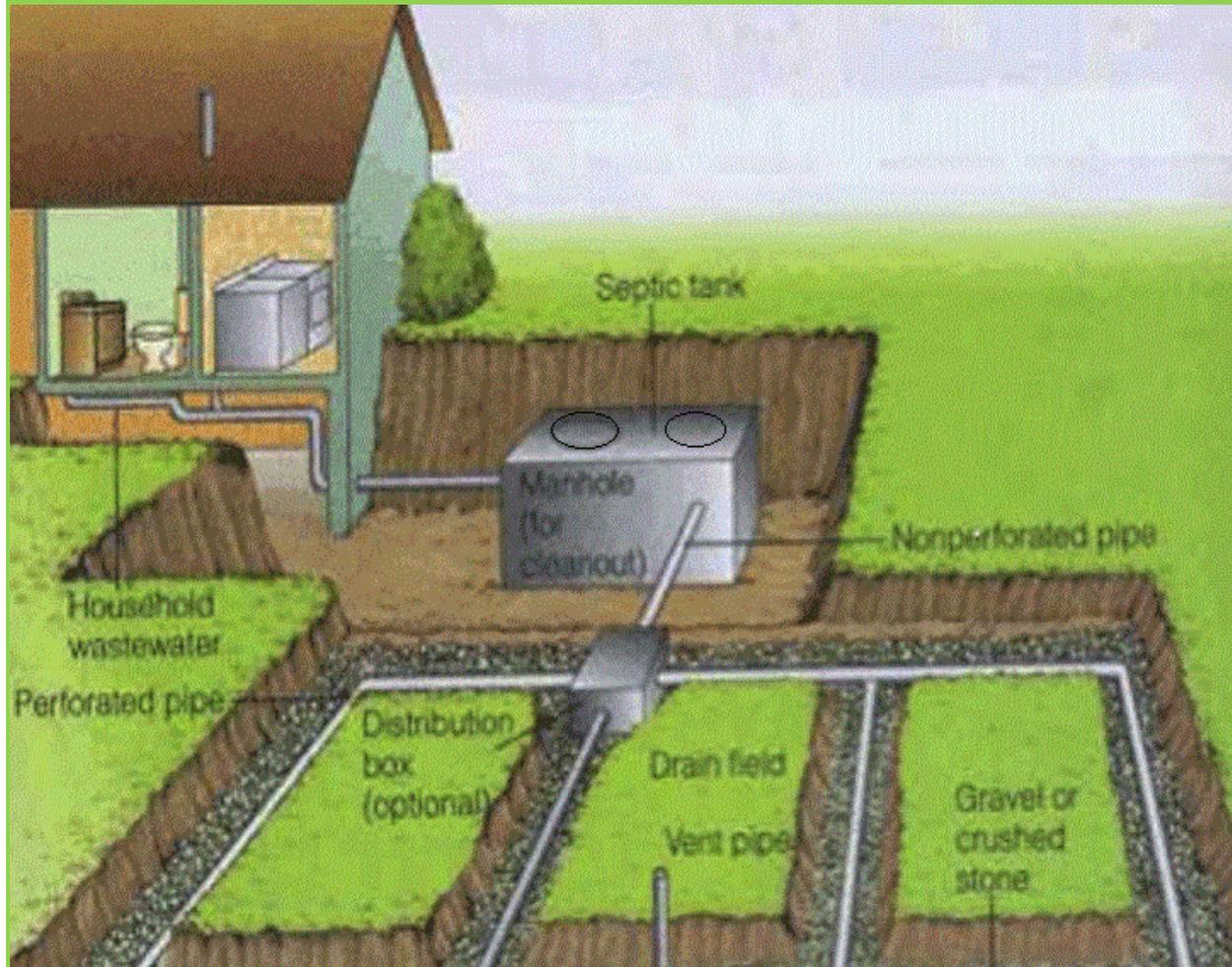


HOMEOWNER'S MANUAL

SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE



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Functions of Septic Tank

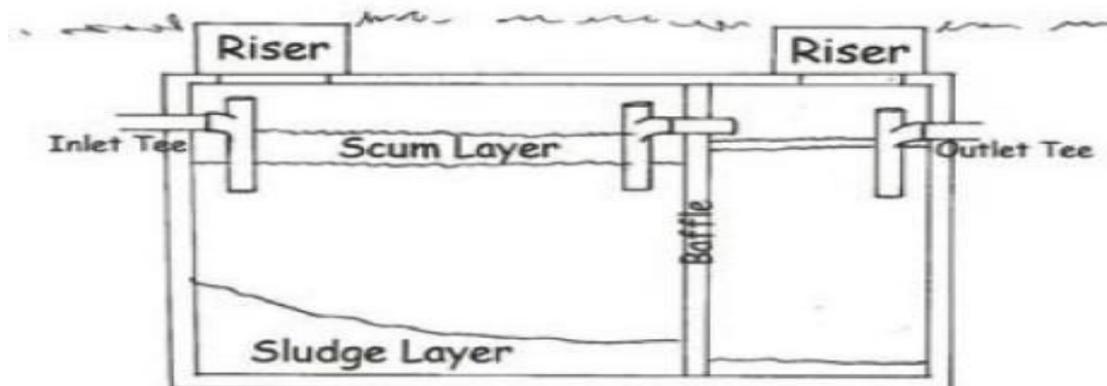
When the toilet flushes or the washing machine, shower etc. run, wastewater leaves the home and collects in a septic tank. The natural bacteria in waste break down most of the solid material into a liquid or gas.

Inside the Septic Tank

Heavy solids or bits of plastic or other material that can't break down, drop to the bottom of the tank and form the sludge layer.

Lighter substances such as grease or oil float to the top, which is called the scum

The relatively clear liquid (wastewater) flows out and is absorbed into the leach/absorption field. It's a relatively simple, natural process.



Leach/Absorption Field

Water flows out of the septic tank and into a Leach/Absorption Field. A leach field is made of perforated pipes buried in trenches filled with gravel.

The water is slowly absorbed and filtered by the ground in the drain field.

A septic system is normally powered by nothing but gravity. Water flows down from the house to the tank, and down from the tank to the drain field.

Be sure to have a healthy grass cover on the absorption field area, but avoid planting shrubs and trees as the roots can damage the septic system leach lines.

Mow, but do not fertilize or water turf grasses over the absorption field.

Keep heavy vehicles (cars, tractors, RVs, etc.) off of tanks & absorption field.

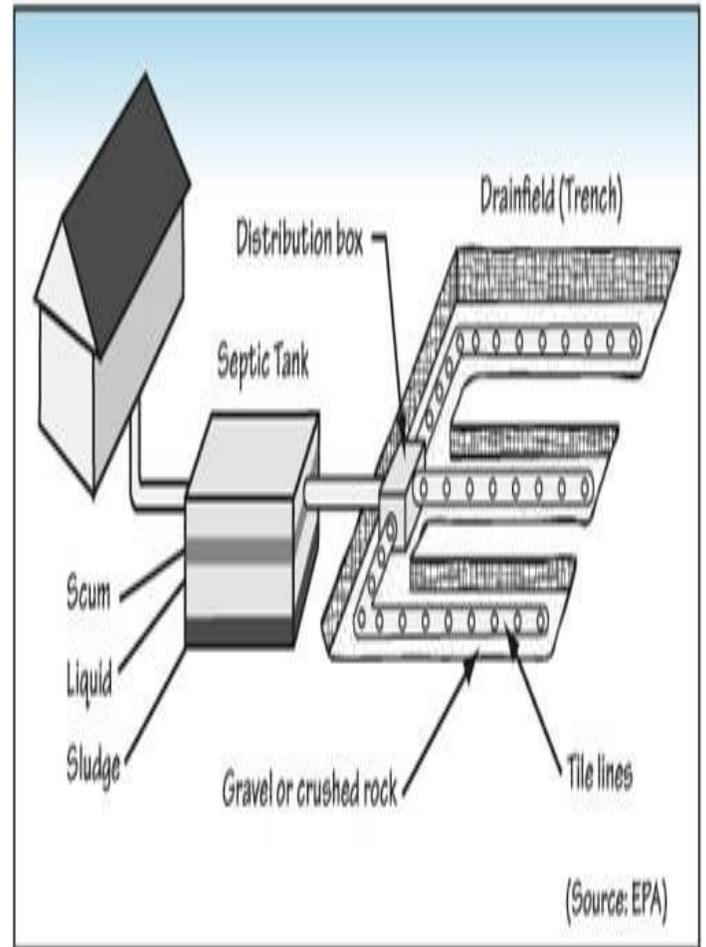


Figure 2 - Schematic of a Drainfield

Why Maintain Your Septic System

Saves you money

Regular maintenance fees of \$200 to \$500 every three to five years is a bargain compared to the cost of repairing or replacing a malfunctioning system, which can cost between \$3,000 and \$10,000 for a conventional system. Alternative systems can cost even more. The frequency of pumping required for each system depends on how many people live in the home and the size of the system.

Protects your property value

An unusable septic system or one in disrepair will lower your property value, and potentially can pose a costly legal liability.

Keeps you and your neighbors healthy

Household wastewater contains disease causing bacteria and viruses and high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. If a septic system is well-maintained and working properly, it will remove most of these pollutants. Insufficiently treated sewage from septic systems can cause groundwater contamination, which can spread disease in humans and animals. Improperly treated sewage poses the risk of contaminating nearby surface waters threatening swimmers with various infectious diseases, from eye and ear infections to acute gastrointestinal illness and hepatitis.

Protects the environment

More than four billion gallons of wastewater are dispersed below the ground's surface every day. Ground water contaminated by poorly or untreated household wastewater poses dangers to drinking water and to the environment. Malfunctioning septic systems release bacteria, viruses, and chemicals toxic to local waterways. When these pollutants are released into the ground, they eventually enter streams, rivers, lakes, and more, harming local ecosystems by killing native plants, fish, and shellfish.

How to Care for Your Septic System

Inspect and Pump Frequently

The average household septic system should be inspected at least every three years by a septic service professional.

Household septic tanks are typically pumped every three to five years. Alternative systems with electrical float switches, pumps, or mechanical components should be inspected more often, generally once a year. A service contract is important since alternative systems have mechanized parts.

Four major factors influence the frequency of septic pumping:

- Household size
- Total wastewater generated
- Volume of solids in wastewater
- Septic tank size

Keep maintenance records on work performed on your septic system.

Don't use septic tank additives. These products usually do not help and some contain chemicals that can hurt your system. Human sewage has plenty of microorganisms to do the job of breaking down sludge!

Use Water Efficiently

The average indoor water use in a typical single-family home is nearly 70 gallons per individual, per day. Just a single leaky or running toilet can waste as much as 200 gallons of water per day.

All of the water a household sends down its pipes winds up in its septic system. Excess water slows down or stops the wastewater treatment process. The more water a household conserves, the less water enters the septic system. Efficient water use improves the operation of a septic system and reduces the risk of failure.

- **High-efficiency toilets.**

Toilet use accounts for 25 to 30 percent of household water use. Many older homes have toilets with 3.5- to 5-gallon reservoirs, while newer, high-efficiency toilets use 1.6 gallons of water or less per flush. Replacing existing toilets with high-efficiency models is an easy way to reduce the amount of household water entering your septic system.

- **Faucet aerators and high-efficiency showerheads.**

Faucet aerators, high-efficiency showerheads, and shower flow restrictors help reduce water use and the volume of water entering your septic system.

- **Washing machines.**

Washing small loads of laundry on your washing machine's large-load cycle wastes water and energy. By selecting the proper load size, you will reduce water waste. If you are unable to select a load size, run only full loads of laundry.

Try to spread washing machine use throughout the week. Doing all household laundry in one day might seem like a time-saver; but it can harm your septic system, not allow your septic tank enough time to treat waste, and could flood your leach field.

Properly Dispose of Waste

Whether you flush it down the toilet, grind it in the garbage disposal, or pour it down the sink, shower, or bath, everything that goes down your drains ends up in your septic system. What goes down the drain affects how well your septic system works.

Toilets aren't trash cans!

Your septic system is not a trash can. An easy rule of thumb: Do not flush anything besides human waste and toilet paper. Use toilet paper that decomposes easily. Purchase brands labeled "safe" for septic systems.

Never flush:

- Cooking grease or oil
- Flushable wipes
- Photographic solutions
- Feminine hygiene products
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Diapers
- Cigarette butts
- Coffee grounds
- Cat litter
- Paper towels
- Pharmaceuticals
- Household chemicals like gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, and paint or paint thinners

Think at the sink!

Your septic system contains a collection of living organisms that digest and treat household waste. Pouring toxins down your drain can kill these organisms and harm your septic system. Whether you are at the kitchen sink, bathtub, or utility sink:

- Avoid chemical drain openers for a clogged drain. Instead, use boiling water or a drain snake.
 - Never pour cooking oil or grease down the drain.
 - Never pour oil-based paints, solvents, or large volumes of toxic cleaners down the drain. Even latex paint waste should be minimized.
 - Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal. This will significantly reduce the amount of fats, grease, and solids that enter your septic tank and ultimately clog its leach field.
-

Maintain Your Leach Field

Your leach field—a component of your septic system that removes contaminants from the liquid that emerges from your septic tank—is an important part of your septic system. Here are a few things you should do to maintain it:

- **Parking:** Never park or drive on your leach field.
- **Construction:** Learn the location of your septic system. Avoid constructing patios, decks, and paved surfaces over your system.
- **Planting:** Plant trees the appropriate distance from your leach field to keep roots from growing into your septic system. A septic service professional can advise you of the proper distance, depending on your septic tank and landscape.
- **Placing:** Keep roof drains, sump pumps, and other rainwater drainage systems away from your leach field area.

Septic System Failure Symptoms

A foul odor is not always the first sign of a malfunctioning septic system. Call a septic professional if you notice any of the following:

- Wastewater backing up into household drains.
- Bright green, spongy grass on the leach field, even during dry weather.
- Pooling water or muddy soil around your septic system or in your basement.
- A strong odor around the septic tank and leach field.
- **DON'T** go down into a septic tank. Toxic gases are produced by the natural treatment processes in septic tanks and can kill humans in minutes. **Extreme Caution** should be taken when inspecting a septic tank, even when just looking in the lid opening. **Contact a professional.**

What are Risers?

Extensions that are added to a septic tank for easier access

Specially manufacture to fit the precise dimensions of a tank

Risers generally range from 6 inches to 12 inches in height and have a diameter of 12 to 24 inches

Many of these risers are also made so that they can be stacked one on top of another. This is ideal if a septic tank is buried deep underground.



Benefits of Risers

They provide a visual reminder

Easier to locate, access, and pump...No digging = less expensive pumping bill

Has a seal to prevent leaking



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