



Residential Septic Systems

5 Things Homeowners Need to Know

What is a septic system?

A septic system is an on-site, sub-surface wastewater treatment system. Commonly used in rural areas where centralized sewer system infrastructure is limited or non-existent, septic systems are utilized in approximately one-fifth of American homes.

If you own one, here are five things you should know about your septic system:

1. Septic systems consist of two primary components: a holding tank and a drain field or leaching field.

- The holding tank, typically concrete or plastic, is where solids settle to the bottom and floatables and grease rise to the top. The middle layer is liquid wastewater, or effluent, that drains to the drain field.
- The drain field or leaching field is a series of pipes or chambers that disperse the effluent into the native soil where the effluent is filtered and treated by bacteria.

2. Septic systems are not 'set it and forget it' systems.

- The drain field filters and treats the effluent (liquid wastewater), but the solids and greases must be pumped out.
- Contact a licensed septic service to pump your septic tank approximately every 3 years. Older systems may require more frequent pumping. If your tank includes a filter, ensure the filter is cleaned or replaced as needed during this time.

3. Be aware of what you are putting into your septic system.

- Certain items can clog your system and should be avoided. These items include feminine products, baby wipes, cat litter and diapers.
- Household chemicals and cleaners can disrupt the biology of the system. Avoid excessive use of bleach, laundry detergent or other household chemicals to maintain optimal system performance.



- Leaky faucets and toilets can add a substantial volume of effluent to the daily flow treated by the drain field. Drain fields are sized for a fixed daily design flow, and additional flow can lead to premature failure. Repair any leaky or broken faucets and toilets as soon as possible.

4. Avoid planting anything over your drain field.

- Keep plants, trees and shrubs away from your drain field.
- The nutrient-rich soil surrounding a drain field will attract the root systems of these plants. The roots can damage and clog the drain field pipe or chambers, reducing the treatment capacity of the system and ultimately leading to premature failure.

5. Septic systems have a service lifespan.

- Whether your septic system consists of a plastic or concrete holding tank, conventional stone and pipe, concrete chambers or an alternative technology drain field such as CULTEC plastic chambers, the service life of a septic system is limited.
- With proper use and regular maintenance, a septic system should last 25-30 years on average.