

Daily Care of Your Septic System

Protect the Tank and Absorption Area

- Grass and other plants with shallow roots are beneficial over an absorption area. Deep roots of trees and shrubs can damage the tank or absorption area. Do not fertilize the soil above the absorption area.
- Do not build patios or other structures over the septic tank or absorption area.
- Keep automobiles and heavy equipment off the absorption area to protect system parts and avoid soil compaction.
- Keep surface water runoff from rain, downspouts, driveways, and sidewalks from flowing toward or pooling on top of your absorption area. If necessary, modify the landscaping to drain this water away from the septic system.

Watch What Goes Down the Drain

- Do not put substances such as motor oil, gasoline, paints, solvents, or pesticides into your wastewater. Don't flush medications. Take these chemicals to household hazardous waste collection events or dispose of them properly with household trash. These materials may pollute groundwater and are often toxic to the microorganisms that break down wastes. For disposal info see dontflushyourdrugs.net and www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8485.html
- Use household cleaners, disinfectants, detergents, and bleach in moderation.
- Oils, fats, grease, and solids such as coffee grounds, paper towels, sanitary pads, and disposable diapers will clog your septic system. Dispose of them in household garbage.
- Food scraps should be composted or disposed in household garbage. Kitchen sink grinders use extra energy and water, and put an extra burden on your septic system.

Avoid Commercial Septic System Additives

- Commercial additives are not needed after pumping. The sludge residue and incoming household wastewater already contain active microorganisms. Yeasts, bacteria, enzymes, and various chemicals are sold with the claim that they help a system work better; however, there is no scientific evidence that such additives are effective. In fact, some additives can cause the solids in an overloaded tank to be re-suspended and clog the drainage lines and absorption area. Additives are not an alternative to proper maintenance and do not eliminate the need for routine pumping of your septic tank.

Conserve Water and Limit the Water Entering the Tank

- Conserve water and choose fixtures and appliances that reduce water use.
- Large amounts of water entering the system in a short time can stir up solids on the bottom of the tank and push wastewater into the absorption area too quickly. Spread laundry and other tasks that use a lot of water over the entire week.
- Do not connect gutter downspouts, basement sump pumps, or footing drains to the septic tank. This water does not need to be treated with the household wastewater.
- Water softeners and other water treatment devices have parts that must be regenerated to continue to work. This produces a very salty brine that can negatively affect septic systems. It is important that treatment devices recharge based on actual use and concentrations rather than by the clock. Since the brine rinse does not need to be treated with the rest of the household wastewater, it can be sent to a separate drainfield. For more information, consult your county health department and see the NYS DOH Residential OWTS Design Handbook (link on the back cover) and the NOWRA and WQA guidance document <http://www.nowra.org/newsrelease/Softnerguidance.pdf>.