

Maintaining Your Septic System

The design life of a septic system is usually several decades. Keep your septic system functioning properly with regular maintenance.

Pumping Out Your Septic Tank

- Generally, sludge and scum should be pumped from the septic tank every three to five years, depending on the size of the tank and the amount and composition of wastewater entering the tank. Use of a kitchen sink grinder greatly increases solids loading so the tank must be pumped more often.
- To determine a maintenance schedule for your household, have the tank inspected every two to three years and pumped as needed. Use that baseline information to plan your regular tank pumping interval.
- Contact a commercial septic tank inspection and pumping service, which must have permits from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to transport and properly dispose of the waste. Pumping the septic system will cost a few hundred dollars. This is much less expensive than replacing parts of your system.

Finding Your Septic System Components

- In order to maintain your system, the septic tank needs to be accessible for pumping and the absorption area should be protected. Check with your county health department to find out what records they have about your system. Septic tanks are sometimes indicated on property survey maps. If the access riser to the tank is at ground level, it is easy to find, but it may be buried under the lawn.
- Locate the sewer pipe leaving your home. Try to find the absorption area by checking the yard for an area where the grass grows differently or there are mounded areas or trenches. The tank is located between the sewer pipe and the absorption area. Any likely site can be probed with a thin metal rod that can reach through the soil to the top of the tank. In the winter warmth from household water may melt snow above the tank. If you are unable to find the tank, your septic tank inspection and pumping service will use a device to find it. You may want to have an access riser extended to the surface or just below ground level and marked clearly with a stake, rock, or other easily moved structure.
- Draw a map of your septic system on the back of this publication or a copy of your property survey map. Sketch your house, driveway, water well, and other landscape features such as trees, rocks, or fences. Sketch your sewer pipe, septic tank, and absorption area in relation to other features. Measure and record distances from your house to your septic tank and to the corner of your absorption area, if possible. As long as the distances are correct, do not be concerned whether or not the drawing is to scale.

Recordkeeping

- Keeping a record of your septic system maintenance will help you anticipate when the next pumping is needed. You can pass this information to subsequent owners when you sell your property. Write information about the tank, pumping history, and local contractors directly on the back of this publication or keep receipts and notes in the folder. Store this folder with other records about your home.