

Septic and STEP System Health Tips

Septic systems are a very simple way to treat household wastewater and are easy to operate and maintain. What you put into your septic system will have a direct effect on whether or not you have a healthy, long-lasting and trouble-free system. Although homeowners must take a more active role in maintaining septic systems, once they learn how their systems work, they can easily appreciate the importance of a few sound operation and maintenance practices.

Most simply put: if it has not been digested, it does not belong in the septic system. Household waste undergoes a biological digestion process in the septic tank; solids and liquid separate in this process. The liquid then flows into the drain field for evaporation.

Here are a few tips and suggestions to promote a healthy septic system:

Keeping the biological digestion process healthy:

- Cooking grease, latex paint, varnishes, thinners, waste oil, photographic solutions, pesticides, or other hazardous chemicals can destroy the process (even in small amounts).
- Excessive water overloads the process. Be reasonable about how much water goes down the drain. Never allow rainwater or runoff into the septic system.
- Avoid using caustic drain openers. Instead, use boiling water, plunger or a drain snake.
- Do not use septic tank additives: commercial septic tank cleansers, yeast, sugar, etc. These products are not necessary and some may be harmful to your system.
- Use commercial bathroom cleaners and laundry detergents in moderation. Alternatives: use a mild detergent or baking soda to clean toilets, sinks, showers, and tubs.
- Check with your local regulatory agency before allowing water softener backwash into your septic system. Excessive salts adversely affect the septic process.

Not a trash can: Avoid putting solids that will not break down into the system. These can clog pipes or damage sewage pumps causing immediate problems or fill up the tank prematurely leading to more frequent pumping; and if not pumped in time, can overflow into the drain field causing extremely expensive repairs:

- Garbage disposals: the best action is to avoid their use. Vegetable matter, egg shells, etc. do not break down sufficiently.
- Do not put disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, paper towels, facial tissues, plastics, cat litter or cigarettes into it.

We hope you found this helpful. Please let us know how we may improve this handout.