

## 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.

An easy rule of thumb: Do not flush anything besides human waste and toilet paper. Never flush:

- Non-flushable wipes, such as baby wipes or other wet 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



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.

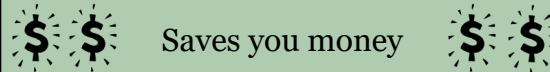
Eliminate or limit the use of a garbage disposal. This will significantly reduce the amount of fats, grease, and solids that enter your septic tank and ultimately clog its drainfield.

## Maintain Your Drainfield

Your drainfield—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 drainfield.
- **Planting:** Plant trees the appropriate distance from your drainfield 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 drainfield area. Excess water slows down or stops the wastewater treatment process.

### Why Maintain Your Septic System



Saves you money

Protects your property value

Keeps you and your neighbors healthy

Information provided by Environmental Protection Agency  
- More details can be found at [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

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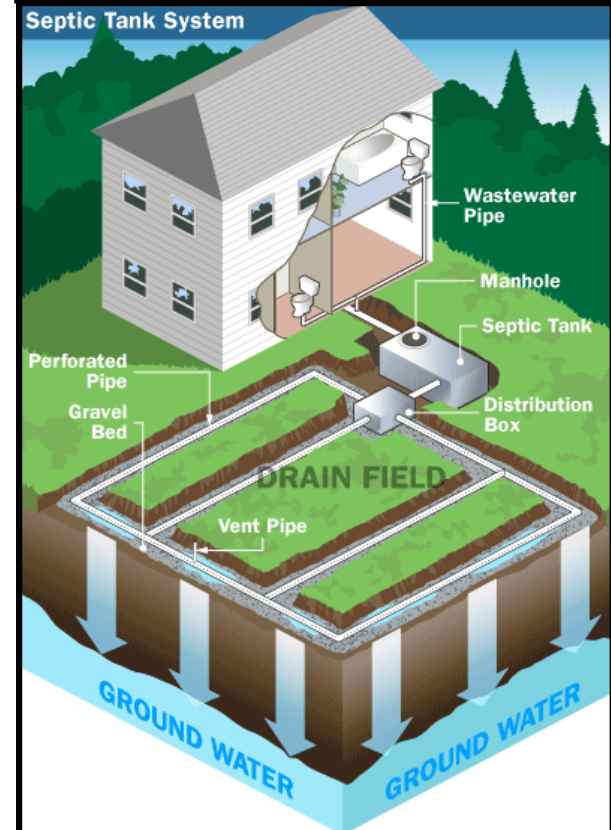
### **Vernon Fork Muscatatuck River Watershed**



Protecting, Preserving & Restoring

# Septic Systems

## Homeowners Guide



## Importance of Maintenance & Care

## What is a Septic System?

Septic systems treat wastewater from household plumbing fixtures (toilet, shower, laundry, etc.) through both natural and technological processes, typically beginning with solids settling in a septic tank, and ending with wastewater treatment in the soil via the drainfield.

More than 60 million people in the nation are served by septic systems. About one-third of all new development is served by septic or other decentralized treatment systems.

## How does a typical septic system work?

- All water runs out of your house from one main drainage pipe into a septic tank.
- The septic tank is a buried, water-tight container usually made of concrete, fiberglass, or polyethylene. Its job is to hold the wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle down to the bottom forming sludge, while the oil and grease floats to the top as scum. Compartments and a T-shaped outlet prevent the sludge and scum from leaving the tank and traveling into the drainfield area.
- The liquid wastewater (effluent) then exits the tank into the drainfield.
- The drainfield is a shallow, covered, excavation made in unsaturated soil. Wastewater is discharged through piping onto porous surfaces that allow wastewater to filter through the soil. The soil accepts, treats, and disperses wastewater as it percolates through the soil, ultimately discharging to groundwater.

## Caring for your Septic System

Septic system maintenance is not complicated, and it does not need to be expensive. Upkeep comes down to four key elements:

### Inspect and Pump Frequently

### Use Water Efficiently

### Properly Dispose of Waste

### Maintain Your Drainfield

## 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

## 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. 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. 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.** 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 drainfield.
- Clothes washers that bear the **ENERGY STAR** label use 35 percent less energy and 50 percent less water than standard models.