

Ten Tips for Maintaining Your Septic System

Courtesy of Department of Human Services
Wastewater & Plumbing Control Program
www.state.me.us/dhs/eng/plumb/10tips.htm

1. **Pump your septic tank every 2-5 years, depending how heavily the system is used.** Insist that the pumper clean your septic tank through the manhole in the center of the top of your septic tank, rather than the inspection ports above the inlet and outlet baffles.
2. **If you use a garbage grinder (a.k.a. "dispose-all"), pump your tank every year.** Or, better yet, remove the garbage grinder and compost your kitchen scraps. Garbage grinder use leads to buildups of grease from meat scraps and bones, and insoluble vegetable solids such as cellulose.
3. **Keep kitchen grease, such as bacon fat and deep fryer oil, out of your septic system.** It is not broken down easily by your system, can clog your drain field, and cannot be dissolved by any readily available solvent that is legal to introduce to groundwater.
4. **Space out laundry loads over the course of the week and wash only full loads.** The average load of laundry uses 47 gallons of water. One load per day rather than 7 loads of Saturday makes a big difference to your septic system. Also, front loading washers use less water than top loading machines.
5. **Install low usage water fixtures.** By installing low water usage showerheads (2.5 gallons/minute), toilets (1.6 gallons/minute), dishwasher (5.3 gallons) and washing machines (14 gallons) an average family can reduce the amount of water entering the septic system by 20, 000 gallons per year! Low flow showerheads and toilets can be purchased at local lumberyards. Water saving dishwashers and washing machines can be purchased at better appliance stores.
6. **Install a septic tank outlet filter in your tank.** These generally sell for \$100 to \$200 depending upon brand and model. They catch small floating particles and lightweight solids, such as hair, before they can make it out to the disposal area and cause trouble. Some models are also designed to capture suspended grease.
7. **Use liquid laundry detergent.** Powdered laundry detergents use clay as a "carrier." This clay can hasten the buildup of solids in the septic tank and potentially plug the disposal area.
8. **Minimize the amount of household cleaners (bleach, harsh cleaners) and similar potentially toxic substances entering the septic system.** Pump your septic tank every 6 to 12 months if you do lots of painting or staining, as with a home remodel or renovation, and you wash the tool in sink or basin which drains to the septic system. Note: some substances are not allowed to be introduced into septic systems or groundwater tables. If in doubt, contact the Local Plumbing Inspector for more information.
9. **Do not use disinfecting automatic toilet bowl cleaners,** such as those containing bleach or acid compounds. The continuous slow release of these chemical into the septic system kills the microorganisms which treat your waste water.
10. **You do not need to put special additives into your septic system.** In fact, some can do more harm than good. Those which advertise that they will remove solids from you tank, usually do. The problem is that the solids exit the tank and end up in the disposal field. Once there, the solids seal off the disposal area, and the system malfunctions. Also, although it hurts nothing, it is not necessary to "seed" a new system with yeast, horse manure, and so forth. Normal human waste contains enough bacteria for the septic tank, and other microbes are already present in the soil and stones of the disposal area.