

So you've installed a new septic tank. What now?

The septic tank is one of the simplest and cheapest ways of dealing with human waste products. It is however a rudimentary system that does not treat water to a very high standard. The septic tank is not a system that you install and then forget about, care must be taken to insure that you use them correctly so that you get a long life from the system. Failure to do so could cause harm to the environment and or health implications for both your family and others in close proximity to your home and be very expensive to replace.

The septic tank system is made up of three basic parts, all of which need to be installed correctly and maintained to ensure that the system continues to work well. Your septic system should be designed by an appropriately licensed person and installed by a licensed plumber.

The first part of the system is the pipe work from the fixtures to the septic tank. The pipe work should be designed to be as direct as possible with the correct (1:60) fall and have continuous fall from the fixture to the inlet of the tank. Care must be taken to ensure that the lid of the tank is at or slightly above ground level, if your pipe work is too deep with correct fall, you must install a ring (or multiple rings) on the top of the tank to increase the depth of the inlet pipe. After correct installation the pipe work is the part of the system that should be pretty trouble free, Please refrain from planting large "water hungry" trees near sewer lines as they will seek out a source if they possibly can, causing blockages in the pipe work.

Next is the septic tank. You will notice that the tank is split into two separate compartments by a plastic baffle (larger systems will have two tanks). The first chamber is the largest, this area is designed to collect the solid materials in the waste water. Materials that are lighter than water float creating a scum, those that are heavier fall to the bottom of the tank forming a sludge. This chamber is where anaerobic bacteria breaks down the waste products, from here the waste water flows into the second chamber where most of the particulates floating in the water settle on the base of the tank.

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As the septic system uses bacteria to break down the waste it is important that you do not use cleaning products or dispose of any product down the drainage system that will kill Bacteria, this includes products that contain chlorine, ammonia, caustic solutions, pesticides, antibacterial substances and also avoid tipping large volumes of beer, wine, milk, fruit juice or oil, fats and grease down the drain. It is most important that sanitary napkins and baby wipes are not introduced to the septic system as they will not breakdown and will only cause problems.

It is however beneficial to use Biological cleaning products and cleaning products that are made specifically for use with septic tanks.

Do not flush.

Coffee grounds, disposable nappies, sanitary napkins, cigarettes, fats, grease, oils, disinfectants, photographic chemicals, pills, unused medications, thinners, kitty litter, tampons, condoms, plastic bags, paper towel, tissues, cloth wipes dental floss pesticides, paints, varnishes, waste oil, poisons, garbage disposal waste, sump pump discharge and backwash discharge from water softeners.

At the rear of the septic tank you will find a filter inserted into the outlet pipe, this filter is in place to stop free floating particulates from leaving the septic tank and blocking up the discharge pipe work in the subsoil disposal area, the filter should be cleaned out annually. Remember that the tank should be cleaned at regular intervals (depending on volume of use) of approx. 4-5 years.

Odours

In the first few weeks of operation it is normal for your septic tank to produce an odour, after a short time this should be replaced with virtually no odour or an earthy humus odour, if there is much change to this situation you may find that you have previously used a chemical or have put a large amount of washing through the laundry, if this is the case the unit will return to working correctly in a few days. Try to spread the laundry evenly over the week instead of all on one day. Sometimes the traps of fixtures that are not used regularly will dry out causing a smell in that area, simply run the water in the fixtures in that area to refill the traps and the smell should subside.

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The third part to a septic system is the waste water disposal area, this is one of the most important areas in the system in that it is the final level of treatment of the waste produced on the property.

This area is a single use area, it is used **only** for the disposal of the waste water from the septic tank, It is **not** a children's playground, it is **not** a motor bike race track, it is **not** a cow or horse paddock, it is not an area to be used for a vegetable garden and it is **not** somewhere to park the family vehicles, it's purpose is to provide an area to dispose of the waste water produced on the premises. At the design stage the designer would have made recommendations as to plants and herbage that should be planted on the site make sure that you follow these instructions i.e.; keep the grass mown if grass was recommended.

By excluding fat, oil and grease from the septic system you will ensure the health of the micro-organisms in the soil thus expanding the ability of the soil to dispose of the waste water and clean up any bacteria that come out of the septic. It is the micro-organisms in the soil that neutralize pathogens in the waste water, it is vital to keep the soil as healthy as possible. Using biological cleaners will help keep the micro-organisms in good health. Also dosing the system with a product like actizyme once every 12 months will help to improve soil health. Remember being proactive and excluding harmful products from the system and treating the disposal area with respect will extend the lifespan of the disposal area.

Remember: Less water used means less water to be treated and disposed of!

Reducing water usage will help you system remain healthy!

Any damp patches or pooling of water on the surface of your waste water disposal area should be reported to your plumber and action must be taken to rectify any problems.

AT NO TIME SHOULD YOU ALLOW ANYONE TO ENTER A SEPTIC TANK IT IS A CONFINED SPACE AND ONCE IN OPERATION IT IS A HEALTH RISK.

Septic tank do's

Do spread laundry use over the week.

Do use water wise fixtures whenever possible.

Do have your septic tank pumped out regularly.

Keep a record of what maintenance has been performed and when it was performed.

Keep a record of where all parts of your septic system are located.

Do be careful on the placement of large trees in relation to the septic system.

Do keep grass mown and tidy.

Do maintain spoon drains and berms to keep ground water from pooling on the disposal area.

Do use liquid cleaners as opposed to powdered cleaners.

Do use biological cleaners as opposed to chemical cleaners.

Do keep tap ware maintained to limit water flow into the system due to taps leaking.

Do keep stock away from disposal area.

Do keep vehicle traffic away from disposal area.