



## HOMEOWNER SEPTIC SYSTEM SERIES:

# Caring for Your Septic System

*Simple maintenance that keeps your system working for decades*

A well-maintained septic system can last 20 to 40 years and cost only a fraction of what a failed system does to repair.



### Three simple rules of septic care:

1. Inspect regularly and pump on schedule
2. Watch what you flush and pour down drains
3. Use water efficiently and protect the drainfield

### 1. Inspect regularly and pump on schedule

Solids settle in the tank over time and must be removed before they reach the drainfield. Have the system inspected regularly and pumped before solids build up too far.

- Have a professional inspect the system every 1 to 3 years.
- Have the tank pumped every 3 to 5 years for a typical household — more often for larger families or smaller tanks.
- Keep a record of every inspection and pump-out, including the date and the pumper.

### 2. Watch what you flush and pour down drains

Your septic system relies on natural bacteria to break down waste. Some items may clog the system or kill the bacteria. **Only flush the “three P’s”: pee, poop and (toilet) paper.**

**Everything else belongs in the trash.** Never flush or put these items down the drain:

- “Flushable” wipes, paper towels, tissues, diapers or feminine products — they don’t break down.
- Grease, fats and cooking oil — they solidify and clog pipes and the tank.
- Coffee grounds, eggshells and food scraps — avoid heavy use of a garbage disposal.
- Harsh chemicals, solvents, paint, pesticides or large amounts of bleach — they kill the helpful bacteria.
- Medications should be disposed of properly, such as through a take-back program.

### 3. Use water efficiently and protect the drainfield

Every gallon you use must be treated by the system. Overloading it with too much water at once is one of the most common causes of failure.

- Fix leaky toilets and dripping faucets promptly — a running toilet can flood a system.
- Spread out laundry over the week instead of doing many loads in one day.
- Install high-efficiency toilets, showerheads, and faucet aerators.
- Run dishwashers and washing machines with full loads.



**Store-bought “septic tank treatments” and additives are generally unnecessary.** A healthy system grows its own bacteria. Some additives can harm the system or push solids into the drainfield.

### Protect the tank and drainfield

- Know where your tank and drainfield are, and keep a sketch with your home records.
- Keep vehicles, heavy equipment and livestock off the drainfield to avoid compacting the soil.
- Direct roof gutters, sump pumps and surface runoff away from the drainfield.
- Don't plant trees or shrubs near the system — roots can clog and damage pipes.
- Never build patios, sheds, driveways or pools over the tank or drainfield.

### Quick reference: Dos and Don'ts

| Dos                                                    | Don'ts                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Pump the tank on schedule                              | Wait until there's a backup                           |
| Flush only the three P's: pee, poop and (toilet) paper | Flush wipes, grease or chemicals                      |
| Conserve and spread-out water use                      | Overload by washing too many loads of clothes at once |
| Keep the drainfield clear                              | Park or build over the system                         |
| Keep maintenance records                               | Rely on store-bought additives                        |



**Keep a maintenance log.** Write down the date and details of every inspection, pumping and repair, along with the location of your tank and drainfield. This record is valuable for troubleshooting and is a strong selling point, if you ever sell your home.

### Additional help and resources

**Contact your local SCDES office** ([des.sc.gov/localoffices](https://des.sc.gov/localoffices)) for help finding licensed installers and pumpers. Find additional information and resources at [des.sc.gov/septic](https://des.sc.gov/septic)