

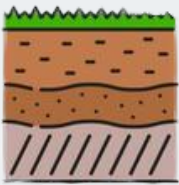


HOMEOWNER SEPTIC SYSTEM SERIES:

How Can I Protect My Drainfield?

Tips for making the most of your land while protecting your septic system

The septic system drainfield (also called the leach field or absorption field) is where wastewater from your septic tank soaks into the soil and is naturally cleaned. So, what you put on top of it matters. **The good news:** with a few rules in mind, the area can still be an attractive, useful part of your yard.



Two things a drainfield needs:

- **Oxygen.** The soil must “breathe” so anything that seals or compacts the surface causes problems.
- **Undisturbed soil and pipes.** Roots, digging and heavy weight can crush or clog buried pipes. Heavy weight also compacts the soil, reducing its ability to absorb wastewater.

Good uses for drainfield space

These uses protect the drainfield while keeping the area attractive and usable:

- **Grass and lawn.** The single best cover. Turfgrass takes up excess moisture, prevents erosion and lets the soil breathe.
- **Wildflowers and shallow-rooted ground cover.** Native grasses and meadow flowers add beauty without deep, damaging roots.
- **Open, low-traffic green space.** A light recreation area that doesn't compact the soil.
- **Light pathways.** Mulch or stepping-stone paths that don't seal the whole surface are usually fine.

Uses to avoid

These damage the system or put people at risk of contact with effluent:

- **Buildings and hard surfaces.** No sheds, decks, patios, driveways, parking or pools — they seal the soil and block access.
- **Trees and large shrubs.** Roots seek moisture and nutrients and will clog or crack pipes.
- **Vegetable gardens.** Avoid growing food on a drainfield; effluent can carry bacteria that can contaminate root crops and low-growing produce.
- **Heavy traffic and weight.** Keep cars, trailers, livestock and heavy equipment off the drainfield — they compact soil and crush pipes.
- **Added soil or fill.** Don't pile soil, mulch or landscaping fabric over the field; it smothers the system.
- **Extra water.** Don't drain gutters, pools, hot tubs or sump pumps onto a drainfield.



Watch the roots

A good rule of thumb: keep trees at least as far from the drainfield as they will grow tall. Fast-growing, water-loving species like willows, poplars and maples are the worst offenders and should be kept well away from a drainfield.

Planting guide at a glance

Plant type	Over the drainfield?
Lawn/turf grass	Best choice
Wildflowers, native grasses	Good
Shallow ground covers, perennials	Usually fine
Vegetables and herbs	Avoid: food safety risk
Shrubs with spreading roots	Avoid: root damage
Trees	Never: keep well away

Landscaping tips that work

- Mark the corners of your drainfield (a discreet stone or marker) so you don't disturb it.
- Mow as usual, but avoid heavy riding mowers when the ground is wet and soft.
- Use shallow-rooted plants and leave the soil surface open to air and sun.
- Direct downspouts and runoff elsewhere so the field isn't overloaded with extra water.
- Leave room for access; your contractor will need access to reach tank lids for service.

If you're planning a project

Thinking about a pool, addition, garage or major landscaping? Locate your tank and drainfield first, and check with your local S.C. Department of Environmental Services office before you build. A little planning prevents an expensive mistake and keeps your system — and your investment — protected. **Find your local SCDES office at des.sc.gov/localoffices**

Contact SCDES for assistance

To locate your septic system, understand setback rules or plan a project near your drainfield, **contact the S.C. Department of Environmental Services** (email info@des.sc.gov or call **803-898-3432** or visit des.sc.gov/septic).