

Choose the Right Plants

Planting is recommended in your septic area because plants help in oxygen exchange and evaporation in your drainfield area. Covering your septic area with plastics, bark, gravel, or patio blocks set in sand won't give your septic system the same benefits as planting.

Your landscape can be attractive and easily maintained when you choose the right plants. Consider drought resistant plants that don't require much watering after establishment. Native plants are adapted to this climate and require less water. They give your landscape a natural look and need less maintenance.

Any plants you choose should have non-invasive roots. Roots that invade your septic area can damage or break pipes. Trees and large shrubs are not recommended in your septic area for this reason. Don't forget, the plants you select should provide coverage over your septic system throughout the entire year. Consider companion planting to ensure all season coverage.

Grasses are most recommended for your septic area because of their high evapo-transpiration rate. Lawn is a popular choice, but remember

to choose a variety that is adapted to the

local climate to reduce watering requirements. Meadow grasses with mixed wildflowers are also an attractive cover for your septic system and they don't require regular mowing.

Use common sense in using fertilizers.

Your septic system is working to treat sewage nutrients in the soil. Read and follow manufacturers directions on fertilizers and pesticides.

Plant List

The number one choice is grass:

- Fescue (Festuca)
- Lawn
- Ornamental grasses
- Wildflower meadow mixes

Ground covers for sun:

- Bugleweed (Ajuga)
- Carpet heathers (Calluga)
- Cotoneaster (Cotoneaster)
- Ground Ivy (Glechoma)
- Kinnickinick (Arctostaphylos)
- Periwinkle (Vinca)
- Soapwort (Saponaria)

Ground covers for shade:

- Bunchberry (Cornus)
- Chameleon (Houtuynnia)
- Ferns
- Mosses
- Sweet Woodruff (Galium)
- Wild Ginger (Asarum)
- Wintergreen (Gaultheria)

This is just a small sample of appropriate plants. There are many more. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more gardening information.

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Other septic system resources are available from:

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or your local health department.

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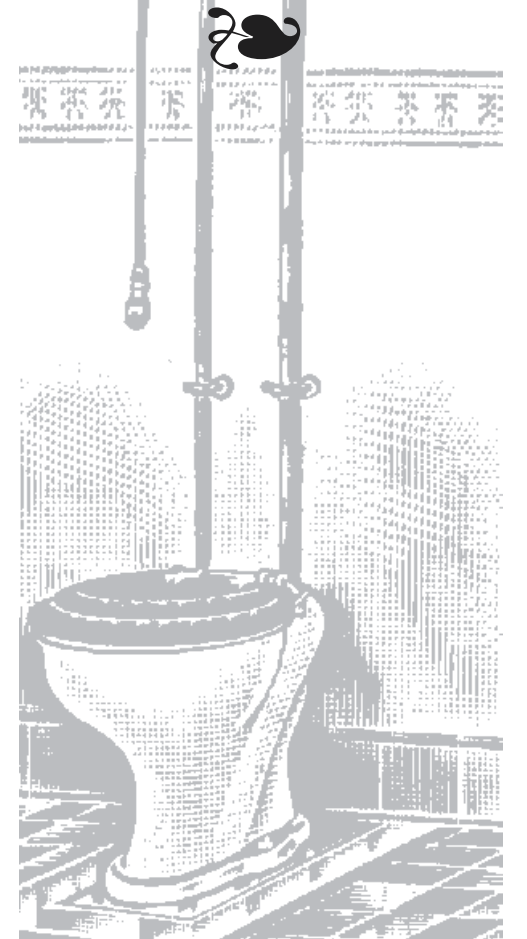
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Knowledge on the Marine Environment

Landscaping Your Septic System



Plan to Keep Your Septic System Safe

In developing a site it is important for homeowners to have a comprehensive plan for the property. By working together with the on-site sewage system designer and installer, you will be able to properly site your system and lawn or garden area and make it esthetically pleasing as well as safe.

Look at your yard with a critical eye to the future. What other plans do you have for your landscape? Do you have construction plans for storage sheds, decks, patios, gazebos, or hot tubs? Construction in your septic system area could damage your tank, pipes or soil. Construction also can block your access to septic components and make maintenance of your system more difficult. Maintenance is a key ingredient to a long and healthy life for your septic system.

Use common sense in all your landscaping construction plans. Plan around your septic system. Know where your reserve area is located. Keep this area free of construction. If your septic system does fail, you may need your reserve area to repair your current system.



Know Your Septic System

For a well-planned landscape design, first you need to understand how your septic system works. Videos and brochures are available to give you information on septic systems.

Take the time to educate yourself in septic system functioning and maintenance, then apply this information to your landscape plan to make the right choices for your situation. For instance, should you plant your vegetable garden over your drainfield area? A standard septic tank separates solids and greases from liquid waste. As effluent slowly trickles through soil, predator microbes consume harmful bacteria, and the treated effluent eventually enters the water table. Sewage effluent is distributed through the soil in the drainfield area. Avoid planting root vegetables in this area, as they may be directly exposed to septic tank effluent. Digging in your drainfield area might also cause harm to the drainfield if not done carefully.

Plan to keep your septic area free of surface water and downspout discharges. Your system is designed to treat the sewage entering from your household. Adding extra surface water to the area overloads your soils and can cause septic system failure. Keep any irrigation system at least 10 feet from the edge of your septic system.

Try to maximize the exposure of your drainfield to sunlight and wind currents to improve its performance. Surrounding the perimeter of your drainfield with tall trees can not only block winds, but their roots could also invade the drainfield lines, interfering with uniform delivery of effluent across the area.

Plan barriers to keep traffic from compacting soils. Compacting septic system

soils can reduce their treatment and disposal functions. Soil organisms need access to air to treat nutrients and pathogens in sewage. Compacted soils are less able to retain oxygen and treat sewage. Soil compaction also decreases the infiltration of water into the soil and therefore increases runoff and the potential for erosion. Compacted soils can negatively affect plant growth by restricting root depth.

Are you planning a rockery? Remember to keep rockery cuts a good distance away from your septic system area to avoid sewage breakouts.

Mark Your Septic Components for Easy Access

Your septic system is a major component of your landscape and requires regular maintenance. Know the exact locations of all your septic system components. Many of the newer systems are being designed and installed so they are accessible at grade. Consider retrofitting your older system with risers to make access easier.

A copy of your septic system records may be available from your local health department or your septic system contractor. You will need to check your septic tank, pump tank, proprietary device and drainfield on a regular basis. Septic maintenance chores are easier when your components are well marked and easily accessible.



Plan attractive markers for your septic components. Use planters, sun dials, sculptures, wishing wells, benches, or bird feeders to mark septic components that need regular inspection. Moving a marker to access a septic port is much easier than digging around in your yard to locate the port for inspection.



Even difficult landscaping situations can be enjoyable. Every situation gives homeowners the opportunity to use their creativity and personal style. You can choose low maintenance native ground covers or a wildflower meadow. Choose a formal lawn for outdoor activities or entertaining. Shallow rooted perennials can be planted for a beautiful cutting flower garden. Attract your favorite wildlife whether it's butterflies or birds.

You will have the peace of mind in knowing that not only do you have a beautiful landscape, but a well-maintained and accessible septic system.

—Teri King and Jodie Holdcroft