

Septic Systems 101

Main Line →

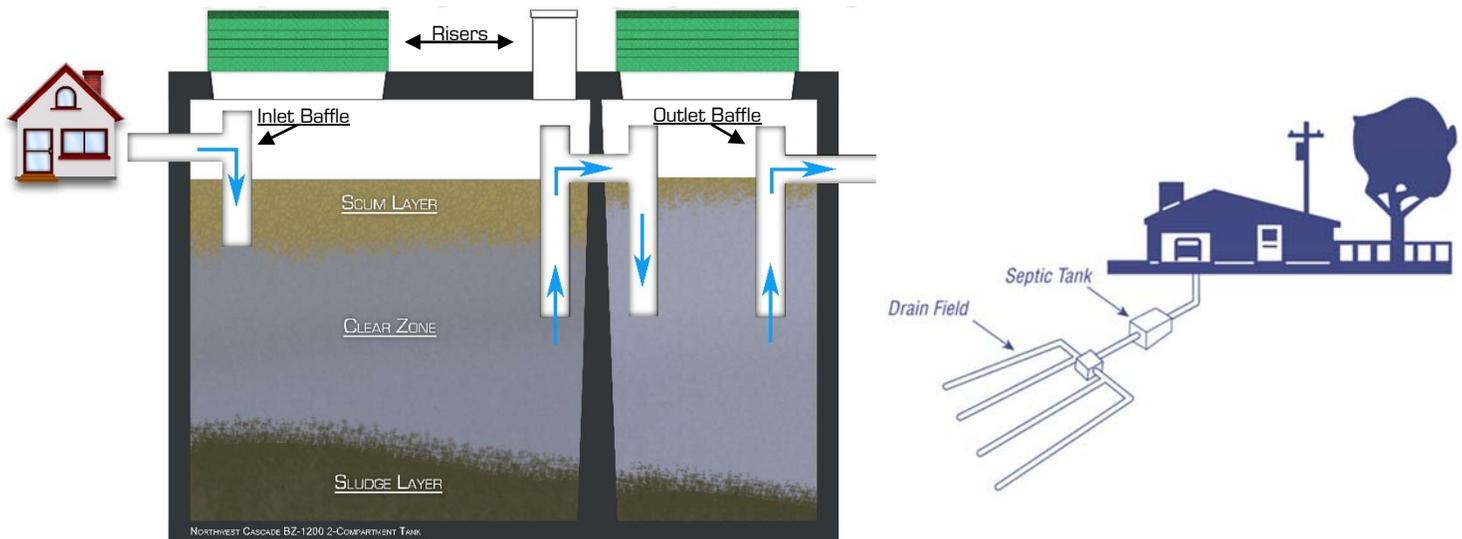
This is the pipe that every sink, floor drain, toilet, washing machine and dish washer ties into. It is usually the only pipe connecting the home to the septic tank.

Septic Tank →

It all ends up here! This is where most of the composting happens. The intent is to hold the solid material in, and allow the liquid (effluent) to leave.

Drainfield

The drainfield is designed to dispose of the effluent and continue composting. When solid materials end up in the drainfield, it usually turns into **big** problems down the road!



Our Biggest Pieces of Advice:

✓ Don't put anything down the drain that you wouldn't eat.

Are we saying you can't clean?? No, we're people too, but we should realize the effect of everything going down the drain. Septic systems are biological; chemical imbalance can lead to major issues. For example: using bleach too often, liquid fabric softener, liquid drain cleaner, or flushing antibacterial wipes can easily cause that imbalance.

✓ Keep up on regular inspections and routine maintenance.

Out of sight, out of mind. Most often, you probably don't think about your system unless there's a problem, right? Think of it like going to the doctor - there are often no issues, but when there is one, it's usually best to act sooner than later. It's important to be aware of the condition of your system, and to stay on top of the small things (pumping, baffle screen cleaning, etc.) so it doesn't become a bigger problem.

Frequently Asked Questions

When should my tank be pumped?

The real answer: when it needs to be pumped. For a family of 4, we recommended pumping every 3-5 years. When 33% of the tank's volume is made up of solid materials, it's time to pump. Keeping the bottom layer (sludge) at least 12" from the bottom of the outlet baffle is the priority. This ensures that liquid (effluent) is the only thing leaving the tank.

There's an alarm going off... what is it?

Don't "silence & ignore" the alarm! It will hurt your system in the long run. Most likely, this is a pump alarm. It means you either have too much or too little liquid in the tank with the pump. This could mean anything from an electrical issue to a drainfield problem. You could check your circuit breaker panel, but have a licensed O&M Technician check it out.

I've heard that garbage disposals aren't good for your system. Is this true?

We have noticed thicker effluent in most homes with garbage disposals; this leads us to believe that separation of solid material isn't taking place like it should be. When that separation doesn't happen, solid materials can flow out to the drainfield. This may not develop into a noticeable problem for many years, but it is negatively effecting the drainfield. We recommend throwing excess food and other waste into the trash.

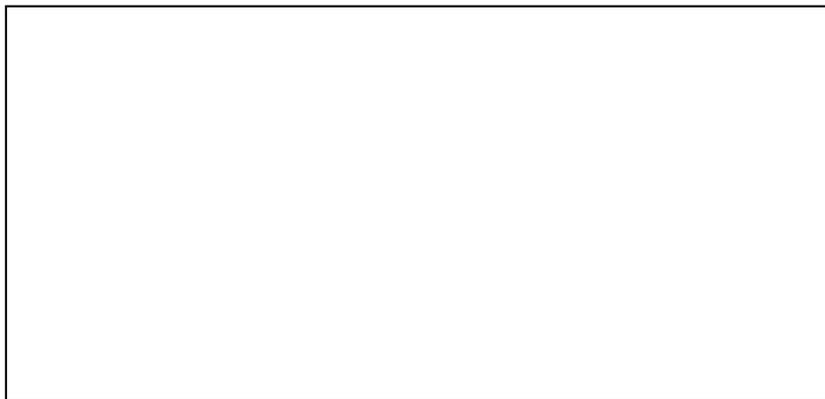
What can I do to prevent my system from failing?

This is the key: ✓ routine maintenance, ✓ water conservation, and ✓ being aware of what is entering the system. The more water that is used, the more physically stressed your drainfield becomes. Cutting water usage can be done through small changes. See our list of Do's & Don'ts for some ideas, and what you should and shouldn't put down the drain. You should also keep a detailed record of all maintenance performed.

Where is my septic tank?

We locate septic system components from as-built drawings. You can look up your system as-built through the health department. Visit the [Resources page](#) on our website for a link.

My Septic System Drawing:



Septic Service Record

Service Date	Description of Services Provided

Save Your Septic System!

DO

- ✓ **Inspect your system annually!**
Having your system inspected once per year will let you know the condition of your system and if anything, like pumping, needs to be addressed.
- ✓ **Pump your tank, don't put it off!**
Keeping the solids out of the drainfield means pumping the tank. Typically, this means every 3-5 years. Don't cause damages that are avoidable.
- ✓ **Do laundry throughout the week!**
Doing all laundry loads on one day can cause hydraulic-overload. It will destroy your drainfield.
- ✓ **Do bleach loads on one day per week!**
1 cup of bleach introduced to a 1,000 gallon septic tank will kill 80% of the bacteria that the system needs for composting. It can take up to 3 days for the bacteria to develop again.
- ✓ **Collect cooking grease and oil!**
Use an old bottle to collect grease, then dispose of it when it solidifies. Don't pour it down the drain, even with hot water. It will solidify down the line and cause more issues.
- ✓ **Check for leaks & conserve water!**
A leaky toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water every day. See the "Finding Leaks" document on our website for instructions.
- ✓ **Divert your downspouts!**
All of your downspouts should lead away from your drainfield. 1,000² ft. of roofing will yield **623 gallons** of water to every inch of rainfall. Your drainfield won't do well with all that extra water.

DON'T

- ✗ **Don't use a garbage disposal!**
They are convenient, but they add food waste and grease to the system. See our FAQ's for more info.
- ✗ **Don't flush non-biodegradable products!**
 - Coffee Grounds
 - Egg Shells
 - Medications*
 - Disposable Diapers
 - Paper Towels
 - Liquid Fabric Softener
 - Paint / Solvents
 - Chemicals
 - Cat-Box Droppings*
 - Cooking Grease/Oil
 - Citrus Skins (lemons)
 - Feminine Products
 - Condoms
 - Antibacterial Wipes*
 - Hair
 - Oil, gas, etc.
 - Cigarettes
 - Cat Litter*
- *Anti-Bacterial products will kill bacteria in the septic tank. This imbalance causes disruption in the composting process and can create more problems.
- ✗ **Don't use septic additives or enzymes!**
Bacteria and enzymes from the solid waste in the tank, by itself, is enough to naturally break down what belongs in the system. Adding products to the tank interrupts the natural composting process.
- ✗ **Don't cover your system components!**
Having decks, patios or concrete slabs over a system can be fatal. All components should be accessible.
- ✗ **Don't drive over your tank or drainfield!**
Significant weight can cause structural damage to system components. Septic tanks are typically concrete, and drainfield lines are PVC pipe. This is one big way you can avoid unnecessary damages.

Got questions? We've got answers!

Call and speak with a licensed Operation & Maintenance Specialist