Septic System Owner's Guide

If you are like most property owners, you might not think much about the sewage that goes down your drains. But if you own a car and understand the importance of preventative maintenance (like changing your oil), you will understand how maintaining your septic system saves money and prevents headaches.

This septic system owner's guide can help you learn how to use and maintain your system properly. It also provides a place to record and keep important information, such as maintenance records.

Read this guide to learn:

- Why it is important to maintain your septic system
- How a septic system works
- How to locate your septic system
- How to take care of your septic system

Why it is important to maintain your septic system

Maintaining your septic system will save you money, help keep you and your family healthy and protect the environment.

- Having your system inspected and pumped regularly is a bargain when you consider that repairs and replacement costs can be thousands of dollars.

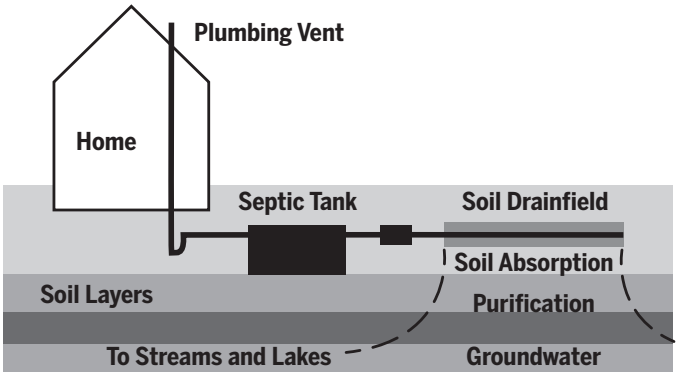
- Untreated sewage contains disease-causing germs and can smell bad. A failing septic system can cause sewage to back up into your house or onto your yard. It also may allow untreated sewage to seep into drinking water wells and water bodies used for drinking and recreation.

- Untreated sewage from failing septic systems may pollute shellfish beds and recreational areas, such as lakes and rivers. Quality of life, recreational opportunities and tourism may decline.

How a Septic System Works

A septic system uses natural processes to treat and dispose of sewage.

Most systems have a septic tank and drainfield. This is called a conventional system. The diagram below shows the parts of a conventional septic system.



A septic tank provides the first step of treatment. It separates and stores solids, greases and oils from sewage so the remaining liquids can go to the drainfield. Some systems need additional tanks and pumps to move this partially treated sewage to the drainfield.

The drainfield and the soil underneath it provides most of the treatment. The drainfield is under the ground, and uses approved drainfield products to spread the partially treated sewage across the bottom of the drainfield so that it can percolate down through the soil. The soil acts as a filter to remove disease-causing germs, some nitrogen and other pollutants.

Some advanced systems provide additional treatment for certain pollutants, like nitrogen. In Florida, these systems are permitted as aerobic treatment units or performance- based treatment systems. Florida has specific maintenance requirements for these systems. Contact your county health department for more information.

All systems, whether conventional or advanced, require maintenance to work properly.

How to Locate Your Septic System

In order to take care of your system, you must know where it is. Locating your system will enable you to ensure your tank is accessible for pumping and that your drainfield is protected.

Locating your system is not always easy. If you do not already have a copy of the installation approval of your septic tank system and your permit application paperwork, contact your county health department to see if they may have copies. The site plan associated with your permit, if available, indicates the approximate location of the system, and other information. Keep the paperwork in this file folder for future reference and pass it on to the next property owner. If you can't get a copy of your permit paperwork, contact a licensed septic system contractor or a licensed plumber who will be able to locate your system for you.

You can also try to locate the system yourself. To find the exact location of the tank, start by looking in your crawlspace to see the direction in which the house's sewer pipe enters the soil, or look for the cleanout of the building sewer, which is usually outside the house. Follow the building sewer pipe to the septic tank. Gently push an insulated probe into the soil to feel for the pipe or the tank. Be careful to not puncture the pipe or old plastic or fiberglass tanks. Of course, call Sunshine State One Call of Florida by dialing 811 before you start to ensure there are no buried electrical cables or other utilities in the area.

When you have your septic tank pumped, mark the location of the septic tank and take a photo of it. This will help you find it again.

Make a sketch on the grid provided below that shows your septic tank and drainfield in relation to your house, driveway, fences or other permanent features.

How to Take Care of Your Septic System

Caring for your system can help you avoid the nightmare of a failing system. If your septic system was properly located, designed and installed, you are in the driver's seat for the care of your system. By following the recommendations below, you can help your system work properly for years to come.

Inspect and Pump Regularly

• Have your septic tank inspected and pumped regularly every 3 to 5 years by a state-licensed septage disposal service. Excess solids in your septic tank or a clogged or damaged filter can cause your system to fail.

• If your system is an aerobic treatment unit or performance-based treatment system, make sure you understand the maintenance requirements in Florida for your system. Contact your county health department for more information.

• Call your county health department, registered septic tank contractor or licensed plumber whenever you experience problems with your system.

Protect Your Drainfield

• Find out where your drainfield is so you can make sure it is protected. See the previous page for tips on how to locate your drainfield.

• Plant only grass over or near the drainfield. Roots from trees and shrubs can grow into the drainfield from long distances, which can clog and damage it.

• Divert downspouts and other sources of water away from your tank and drainfield area. Too much water entering the tank and drainfield area prevents proper treatment and can cause your system to fail.

• Prevent vehicles from driving or parking over your septic tank or drainfield.

• Don't cover any part of the drainfield without a permit and don't dig around it.

Watch Your Drains

• Don't pour strong chemicals, cleansers or unwanted medications down your drains or toilets. These can kill the bacteria in the septic tank that help treat sewage. Also, do not pour cooking oil or grease down your drains, which can clog the drainfield.

• Don't use your toilet to flush anything but human waste and toilet paper. Anything else, including "flushable" wipes and kitty litter, can clog and/or possibly damage your septic system.

• Don't use a garbage disposal, or at least limit its usage. If you use a disposal, you should have your tank checked more often than normally suggested.

• Don't allow backwash from water softeners to enter your septic system. Discharge from water softeners should be re-routed at least 15 feet from the tank and drainfield.

Use Water Wisely

• Conserve water to reduce the amount of sewage that must be treated and disposed of by your system. Repair any leaking faucets or toilets promptly.

• Do laundry over several days instead of all at once to put less stress on your system. Consider the installation of a separate laundry system.

Did you find this guide helpful? Let us know what you think at SurveyMonkey.com/r/6H9X75J

System and Maintenance Records

Use the following spaces to record information about your septic system. Some of this information can be copied from your construction permit. Your county health department may have a copy on file.
Good maintenance records can be a positive selling point for your property if/when the time comes.

Permit Number: _____ **Issued To:** _____

Date Issued: _____ **Address:** _____

System Description: _____

System Type:

☐ **Conventional** (not an aerobic treatment unit (ATU) or performance-based treatment system (PBTS))

☐ **ATU***

☐ **PBTS***

*Note that Florida has specific maintenance requirements for these systems. Contact your county health department for details.

Drainfield

☐ **Trenches**
Number of Trenches: _____
Trench Length: _____

☐ **Bed**
Drainfield Dimensions: _____

☐ **Special Features**
Drip Irrigation? (yes/no)
Low pressure distribution? (yes/no)
Inground Nitrogen-reducing Biofilter? (yes/no)
Other _____

Tank(s)

☐ Septic Tank Size (gallons): _____
Pump Tank Size (gallons): _____

Septic System Installer:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____
Date System Installed: _____
Permit Final Approval Date: _____

Septic System Pumper:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____

System Maintenance Record

DATE	WORK DESCRIPTION	COMPANY	COST

For more information, contact your county health department. To find your county health department, visit: **FLHealth.gov/all-county-locations.html**