Information Sheet #2

Caring for your septic system drainfield.

CRD | Septic Savvy

Protect your Drainfield

The drainfield includes the pipes that discharge your wastewater as well as the soil beneath those pipes that receives and further treats the wastewater. The drainfield is the most complicated and expensive part of the septic system to repair or replace – it is a substantial investment. Treating it right and protecting it from damage can save considerable money and protect water quality and your family's health.

Remember to maintain easy access to your tank and drainfield at all times for regular inspection and pumping.

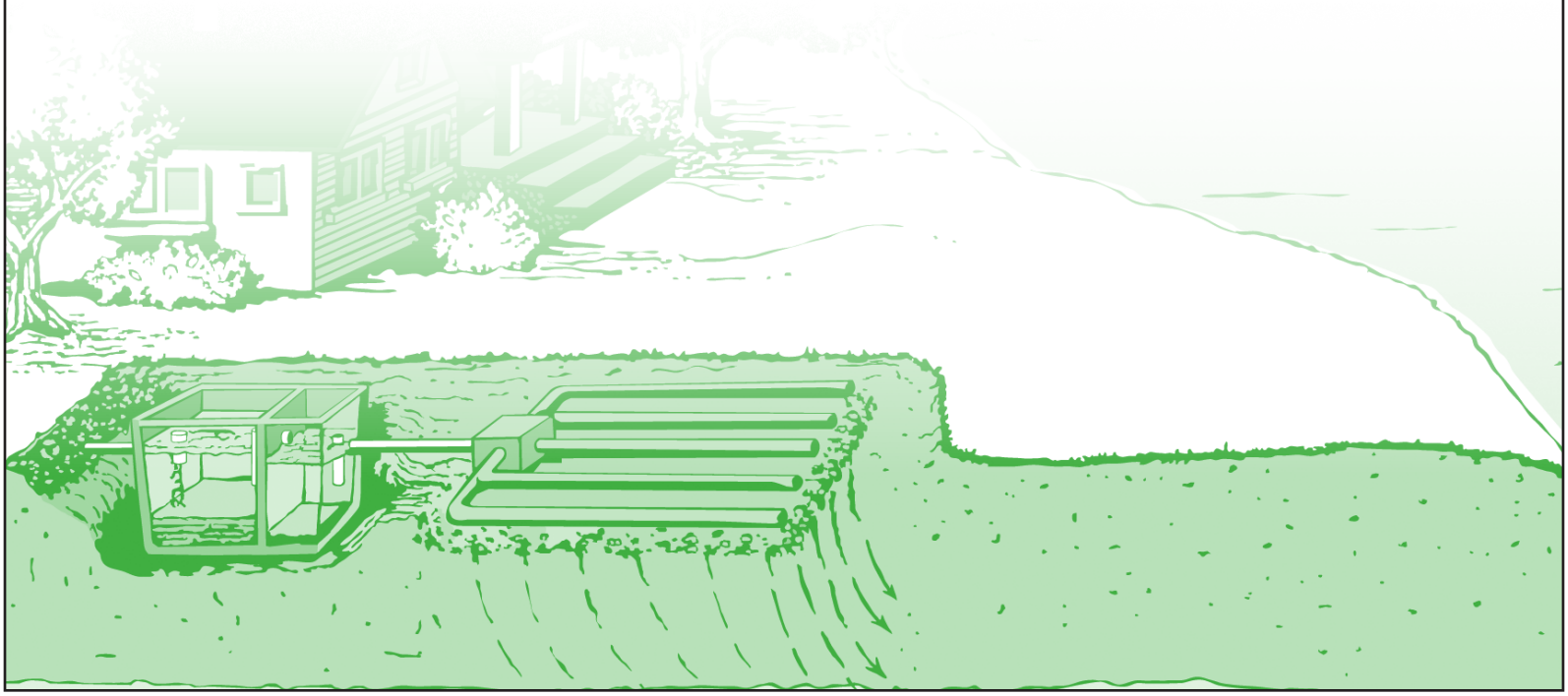
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What can I plant over my drainfield? Grass is the ideal cover for drainfields. If your tank covers are buried, keep in mind that plantings over the tank – from inlet to outlet – will have to be removed every three to five years for inspection and pumping.

2. Can I plant trees and shrubs near my drainfield? Trees and shrubs generally have extensive root systems that seek out and grow into wet areas such as drainfields. If you do plan to plant trees near a drainfield, consult an expert to discuss your ideas and needs.

3. Can I plant a vegetable garden over my drainfield? No. Growing vegetables over a drainfield is not recommended. Vegetables need watering and excess water in the soil reduces its ability to treat wastewater. The deep roots of some vegetables may damage drainfield pipes. Bed preparation, such as rototilling or deep digging, can also damage pipes.

4. What about landscape plastic or fabric under mulch? No. Plastic reduces the necessary air exchange in the drainfield soil. Even mulch or bark over the drainfield is not recommended because it reduces air exchange and retains water.



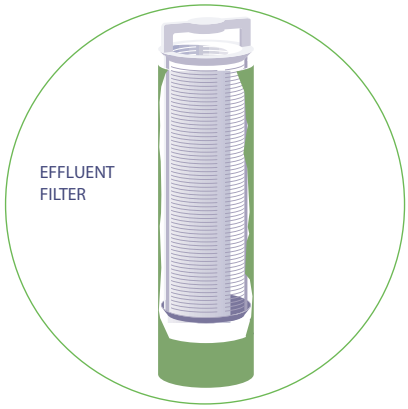
5. Can I build a carport or camper pad over the drainfield? How about a tennis court or a hot tub? No, for two reasons. First, you should avoid driving over the drainfield. The pressure of vehicles and heavy equipment compact the soil and can damage pipes. Second, impermeable materials such as concrete and asphalt reduce evaporation and the supply of oxygen to the soil. Oxygen is critical to the proper breakdown of sewage by soil microorganisms.

6. How about putting my carport over the replacement area? No. The designated drainfield replacement area (reserve area) should be left undeveloped and protected from compaction. It should be treated with the same care as your drainfield.

7. Does livestock need to be kept off drainfields? In the winter, livestock trample and muddy the soil; in the summer they compact it. Again, this is not good for the soil's ability to exchange oxygen. Even a dog kennel or confinement area should not be sited over the drainfield.

8. Rain water is directed onto my drainfield. Is this a problem? Yes. Extra water will saturate the soil and prevent the drainfield from treating wastewater properly. Downspouts and stormwater from surfaces such as driveways and patios should be diverted away from the septic tank and drainfield. A small trench uphill from a drainfield can help direct water away.

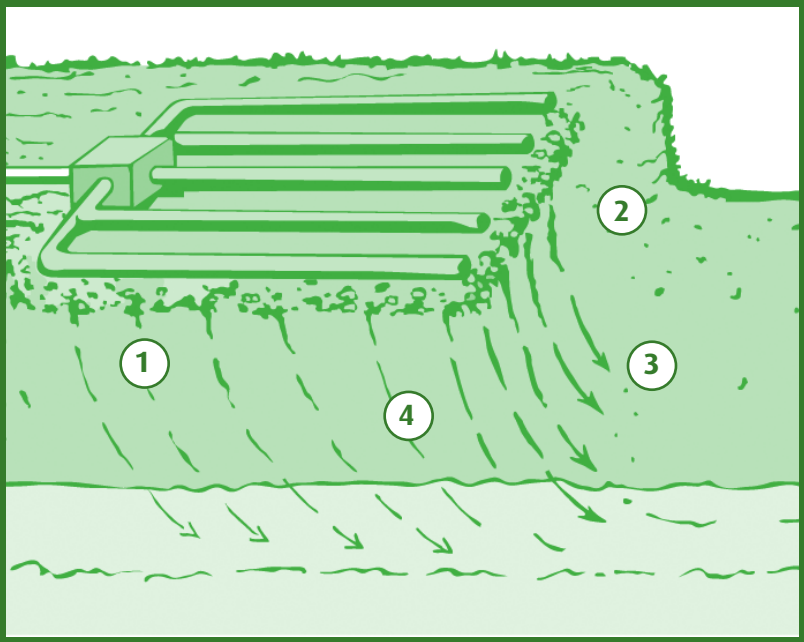
9. How close to the drainfield can I install a sprinkler system? Water lines should be at least 10 feet from all components of the septic system. Be sure all sprinkler lines are fitted with approved backflow prevention devices and check them annually for leaks.



10. How does an effluent filter protect my drainfield? An effluent filter fits securely in your outlet T and is highly effective at keeping solids out of the drainfield. It forces the wastewater to pass through small holes before entering the drainfield and keeps solids inside the septic tank where they can be pumped out. They range in price from $75 to $300 and are well worth it.

11. My roof gutters are connected to my septic system is this ok? No. "Clean water" wastes, such as footing drains, roof drains, water softeners, or dehumidifiers do not need to be connected to the septic system, they only add excess water. Water conservation should be practiced in order to minimize the flow of water through the drainfield.

How does the soil treat wastewater?



1. The soil filters out particles that make wastewater appear cloudy.
2. Organic matter is removed as it is a food source fro microoganisms living in the soil.
3. Disease-causing bacteria are filtered out of the wastewater by the soil and once trapped, either die in this hostile environment or become a source of food for microorganisms.
4. Viruses are chemically attracted to soil particles which removes them from the wastewater.

Making a difference...together

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