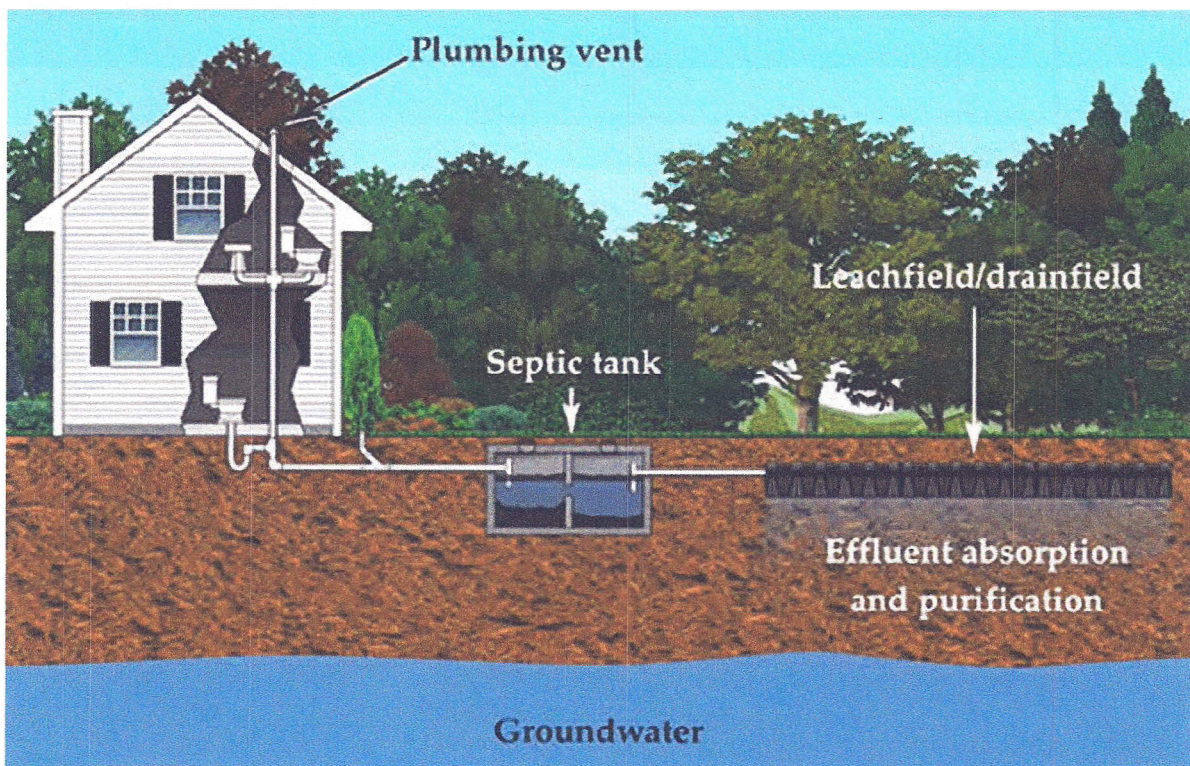


SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

A Guide to the Proper Care and Maintenance of Your Onsite Septic System



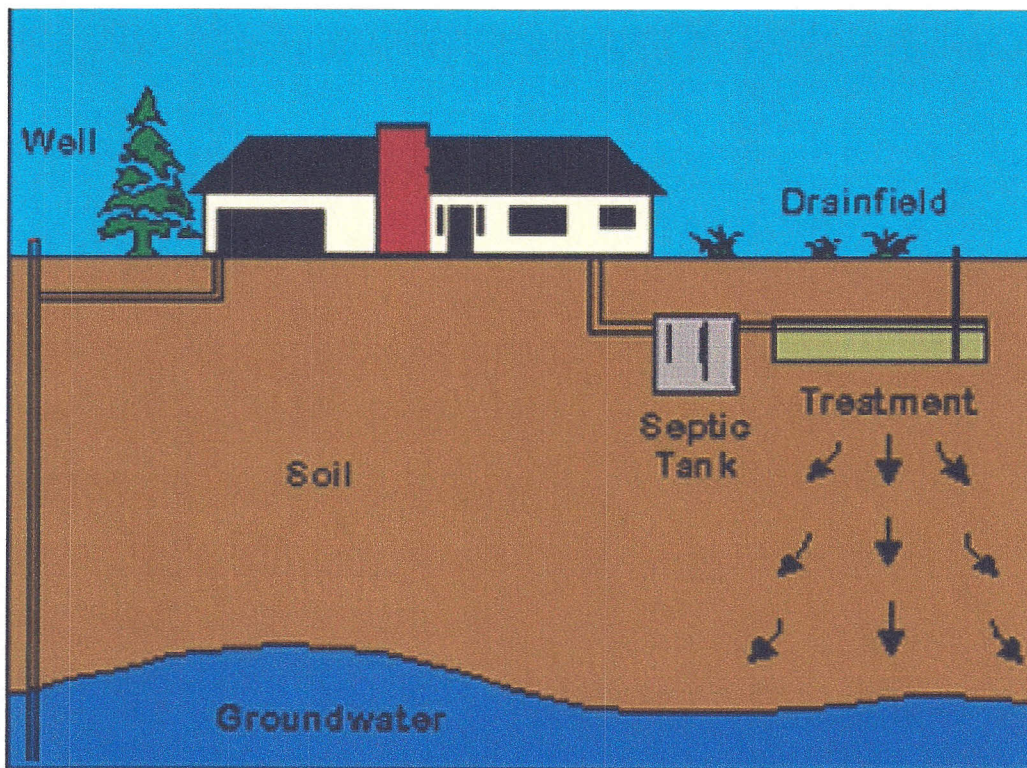
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Onsite Septic Systems (OSS)

Almost 25% of US homes dispose of domestic wastewater through onsite septic systems (OSS). These systems account for the most common wastewater treatment systems used in unsewered areas of eastern Gwinnett County. Unlike public sewer systems, septic systems require maintenance for proper functioning. Like an automobile, air conditioner, or any other system, septic systems need periodic maintenance to extend the life of the system and to avoid costly emergency repairs.

How Septic Systems Work

A typical septic system contains two major components: a septic tank and a soil drainfield.



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The septic tank:

- ◆ Removes solids, which help protect the soil drainfield from clogging that, can result in premature failure of the onsite system.
- ◆ Digests a portion of the solids and stores the remaining portion. Up to 50% of the solids that remain in the tank decompose. The remaining 50% accumulates in the bottom of the tank as sludge. When the level of sludge exceeds the tank's holding capacity, the sewage has less time to settle before leaving the tank. Eventually, the sludge level increases enough to allow solids to enter into the drainfield, resulting in damage to the field and the need for extensive repairs.

The soil drainfield:

- ◆ Is located underground in an unsaturated soil area on your property.
- ◆ Further treats the effluent through physical, chemical, and biological processes. The field consists of a series of underground perforated pipes installed in a one-foot deep layer of washed gravel, or a series of plastic chamber units. Here, the effluent is distributed, stored, and ultimately applied to the soil for treatment. After filtering through the soil, the effluent enters the groundwater level for final disposal.

Septic System Maintenance

- ◆ The owner of an onsite septic system is responsible for properly operating, monitoring, and maintaining the system to minimize the risk of failure. Lack of proper maintenance often results in septic system failures. These system failures result in repairs which typically costs between \$3,000 to \$15,000 or even more if a failing system must be replaced with a completely new, on-site sewage system
- ◆ A poorly functioning septic system can also be a serious cause of water pollution. Stormwater can carry harmful bacteria from failing septic systems into rivers, lakes, streams, and groundwater.



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Septic System Do's & Don'ts

Do's:

- ◆ Learn the location of your septic system, drainfield and reserve area, and keep a sketch of it with the maintenance records.
- ◆ Have your septic tank inspected by a certified specialist every 3 - 5 years or as required by the Gwinnett County Department of Environmental Health.
- ◆ Keep your septic tank cover accessible for inspections and pumping. Install risers if necessary.
- ◆ Keep detailed records of repairs, pumpings, inspections, permits, and other maintenance activities.
- ◆ Conserve water to avoid overloading the system; stagger wash load days and repair any leaks.
- ◆ Divert other sources of water (roof drains, house footing drains, sump pumps) away from system.
- ◆ Contact a professional when you experience problems with your system.
- ◆ Obtain a permit from Gwinnett County Department of Environmental Health (770) 963-5132 for all repairs and alterations.
- ◆ Use household cleaners in moderation and follow directions on labels.

Don'ts:

- ◆ Don't enter a septic tank; toxic gases are produced in the tank that can be deadly within minutes.
- ◆ Don't drive, park, or do any activity that will compact the soil on top of the system.
- ◆ Don't plant anything over or near the drainfield except grass. Roots can damage the drain lines, and trees may shade the drainfield. Excessive irrigation over or near the system may also cause damage.
- ◆ Don't dig into the drainfield or cover it with any hard surface or building.
- ◆ Don't repair your system without a required permit from the Gwinnett County Department of Environmental Health (770) 963-5132.
- ◆ Don't use septic tank additives.
- ◆ Don't use your system as a trash can for grease, coffee grinds, cigarette butts, diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms, paper towels, plastics, cat litter, latex paints, pesticides, any hazardous chemical, or other non-biodegradable substance.

For permitting activities and/or additional information on septic systems contact the Gwinnett County Department of Environmental Health at (770) 963-5132.



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