

# Be Septic Safe



Septic tank systems work through a natural biological process and need ongoing maintenance and care to ensure they work properly. What you put down your drains and toilets will affect how well your septic system functions. Adopting 'low impact' household practices also reduces the environmental impact of wastewater discharges.

## Get to know your septic system

It may include a grease trap, septic tank, sand filters and effluent trenches. Different systems have different maintenance requirements. Identify and locate all the components of your system and make sure they're accessible for inspections and pumping out.

## Regular maintenance

- Inspect the system regularly
- Pump out septic tanks at least every three years and grease traps every 6 – 12 months (see 'Septic Tank Cleaning Services' in the Yellow Pages)
- Don't cover, build on, concrete or drive over the septic tank or the pits connected to the system
- Some systems must have regular tests on treated effluent (see 'Analysts' in the Yellow Pages). Council notifies owners when tests are due and requires the results within 14 days.

## Looking after your septic system

### Do

Do try to use less water – too much can overload the septic system and also creates more wastewater that must be contained on your property.

Do run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full, and stagger the loads to avoid overloading the septic system.

Do use a sink strainer so food scraps don't go down the drain.

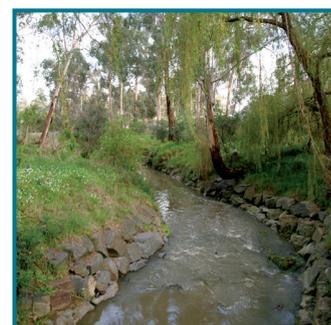
Do choose biodegradable products that specifically state they are suitable for septic systems.

### Don't

Don't use too many disinfectants, cleaners, bleaches, antibacterial agents and tree root clearing products – they can all kill the bacteria that help your septic tank to function. Detergents with low phosphorus content are best.

Don't dispose of nappies, sanitary napkins, tampons or condoms down the toilet – they don't break down easily and can cause blockages.

Don't pour cooking oil, fats, grease or tea leaves down the sink – they can cause blockages.



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## Odours

Sometimes new systems are smelly as the biological process gets established. If this is a problem, flush a handful of lime down the toilet every day for about a week or until the smell goes away.

## Plants

Choose the right plant species to plant near your septic system. Some plants can even help effluent disposal trenches to function. Don't shade trenches with plants unless the plants are drawing water from the trenches. Grasses are best near the first few rows of trenches because they have a fibrous root system that won't invade the pipes. Many other plants are also suitable so long as they will soak up water during the wetter months and do not have invasive root systems. The following are indigenous plants that won't escape and become weeds in nearby bushland.

## Suitable plants

Grasses and grass like plants: Weeping Grass, Purple-sheath Tussock-grass, Common Tussock-grass, Kangaroo Grass, Hooker's Fescue, Australian Sweet Grass, Sedges including Tall, Tassel and Knob Sedges, Spiny-headed Mat-Rush, Pale Rush, Green Rush.

There are a variety of other water-loving plants including groundcovers, wildflowers and small shrubs that are also suitable. Check with your local indigenous nursery.

## More information

*Septic System Maintenance* Fact Sheet

Health and Local Laws Unit  
Manningham City Council  
Phone: 9840 9333

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Search for "sewer program"

[www.lanfaxlabs.com.au](http://www.lanfaxlabs.com.au)  
Information about detergents and household products

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