

Choose the Right Plants

Planting is recommended in your septic area because plants help in oxygen exchange and evaporation in your drainfield area. Covering your septic area with plastics, bark, gravel, or patio blocks set in sand won't give your septic system the same benefits as planting.



Credit: pinterest.com

CONSIDER:

- Grasses, which have a high evapotranspiration rate.
- Drought resistant (native) plants that require minimal water after establishment.
- Choosing plants that have non-invasive roots to avoid damage to your septic area.
- Plants that provide year-round coverage — companion planting can help accomplish this.
- If planting lawn, remember to select a variety that is adapted to the local climate to reduce watering requirements.
- Meadow grasses with mixed wildflowers as an attractive cover for your septic system — and they don't require regular mowing!
- If planting trees, only do so a minimum of 20-feet away from your system. Plant trees known for searching out water (poplar, maple, willow or elm) a minimum of 50-feet away.

Use common sense when using fertilizers. Your septic system is working to treat sewage nutrients in the soil.
Read and follow manufacturer directions on fertilizers and pesticides.

Plant List

The number one choice is grass:

- Fescue (Festuca)
- Lawn
- Ornamental grasses
- Wildflower meadow mixes



Fescue (Festuca)
Credit: ndsu.edu

Ground covers for sun:

- Bugleweed (Ajuga)
- Carpet heathers (Calluga)
- Cotoneaster (Cotoneaster)
- Ground Ivy (Glechoma)
- Kinnickinick (Arctostaphylos)
- Periwinkle (Vinca)
- Soapwort (Saponaria)

Ground covers for shade:

- Bunchberry (Cornus)
- Chameleon (Houtuynnia)
- Ferns
- Mosses
- Sweet Woodruff (Galium)
- Wild Ginger (Asarum)
- Wintergreen (Gaultheria)



Wild Ginger (Asarum)
Credit: clemson.edu

This is just a small sample of appropriate plants. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more gardening information.



Contact:

Central District Health Department
Environmental Health
208-327-7499

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LANDSCAPING *your septic system*





When developing your property, look at your yard with a critical eye to the future.

What other plans do you have for your landscape? Do you have construction plans for storage sheds, decks, patios, gazebos, pools, or hot tubs? Construction in your septic system area could damage your tank, pipes or soil. Construction also can block your access to septic components and make maintenance of your system more difficult.

Maintenance is a key ingredient to a long and healthy life for your septic system.

Use common sense in all your landscaping construction plans. Plan around your septic system. Know where your reserve area is located and keep this area free of construction and of any landscaping you don't want to remove.

If your septic system does fail, you may need your reserve area to repair your current system.

Know Your Septic System

Educate yourself in function and maintenance of your septic system and apply the information to your landscape plan.

A standard septic tank separates solids and greases from liquid waste. As effluent slowly trickles through soil, predator microbes consume harmful bacteria, and the treated effluent eventually enters the water table. Sewage effluent is distributed through the soil in the drainfield area.



Plan to keep your septic area **free of surface water and downspout discharges**. Your system is designed to treat the sewage entering from your household. Adding extra surface water to the area overloads your soils and can cause septic system failure.

Try to **maximize the exposure of your drainfield to sunlight and wind currents** to improve its performance. Surrounding the perimeter of your drainfield with tall trees can not only block winds, but tree roots could also invade the drainfield lines, interfering with uniform delivery of effluent across the area.

Plan barriers to keep traffic from compacting soils. Compacting septic system soils can reduce their treatment and disposal functions. Soil organisms need access to air to treat nutrients and pathogens in sewage.

Compacted soils are less able to retain oxygen and treat sewage. Soil compaction also decreases the infiltration of water into the soil and therefore increases runoff and the potential for erosion.

Avoid planting root vegetables in this area, as they may be directly exposed to septic tank effluent. Digging in your drainfield area might also cause harm to the drainfield if not done carefully.

Mark Your Septic Components for Easy Access

Your septic system is a major component of your landscape and requires regular maintenance. Know the exact locations of all your septic system components. Many septic tanks are being designed and installed so they are accessible at grade. **Consider retrofitting your older septic tank with risers to make access easier.**

A copy of your septic system records may be available from your local health department or your septic system contractor. You will need to check your septic tank, pump tank, proprietary device and drainfield on a regular basis.

Septic maintenance chores are easier when your components are well marked and easily accessible.

