

10 Commandments for Septic Owners

The Lake Rosalind /Marl Lake Water Quality Committee recognizes that a septic system is an important investment for your residence. With replacement costs exceeding \$25,000 it is to everyone's benefit to make sure it is maintained and running at peak efficiency. A properly running septic system also helps our lakes remain healthy.

Here are the 10 Commandments for Septic System Owners—all the septic rules in one place.

1. Thou Shall Pump When Needed

Your septic tank never rests. It's always breaking down waste, processing wastewater before moving it to the weeping bed. And it doesn't like to be forgotten.

A properly working septic tank will need pumping **every 3-5 years** on average. This allows for removal of waste accumulation and sludge that the healthy bacteria in your tank can't break down. Some municipalities are recommending every 3 years for full time residents and 5 years for seasonal but this can depend on number of residents and water usage for each system.

2. Thou Shall Not Flush "Flushable" Wipes

Perhaps the biggest misnomer surrounding septic systems, "flushable" wipes are killing your septic tank. If they don't break down in a blender, they won't break down in your tank. Save your system and your wallet and toss those "flushable" wipes in the trash instead.

3. Thou Shall Follow All "Do Not Flush Rules"

In fact, toss everything but toilet paper in the trash. It's time to stop treating your septic system like a trashcan.

What should get tossed and **not flushed**?

Feminine Hygiene Products, Condoms, Paper Towels Diapers, Baby Wipes or Any "Flushable" Wipes, Dental Floss, Cleaning Chemicals, Sponges, Q-Tips, Cotton Balls, Liquid or Tablet Medication, Cigarette Butts, Band-Aids, Cat Litter, Hair Clippings, Chewing Gum

4. Thou Shall Not Abuse the Garbage Disposal

It's easy to avoid the dreaded garbage smell and toss everything down the disposal. I mean, that's what it's for right? Wrong! Your garbage disposal is not your trashcan. Better yet, do not use the disposal. Some recommend pumping the tank every 2 years if a garbage disposal is used

Overuse and improper use are causing septic owners headaches because of the damage to the delicate septic tank balance. What should you avoid stuffing down the drain?

Fibrous and Stringy Foods, Bones, Seeds or Pits, Coffee Grinds, Oil, Fats and Grease, Egg Shells, Beans, Rice and Pasta, Potato Peels, Non-Food Items

5. Thou Shall Avoid Chlorine Bleach Products

Praised for its antibiotic powers chlorine bleach doesn't discriminate where it kills bacteria—on your counters, in the sink, and in your septic tank. And it's found in everything: laundry detergent, toilet cleaners, shower cleaners, surface cleansers.

Save your tank. Replace bleach-based products with natural alternatives like baking soda, vinegar, hydrogen peroxide and lemon juice. If you must use bleach use it sparingly and in low-concentrated doses.

6. Thou Shall Conserve Water

The less, the better. All the pipes lead to your septic system. The more water your system has to process the more work it has. The more work, the more backed up—eventually leading to some significant problems. It's time to start conserving water. Do not do multiple loads of wash in one day. Make sure you are using water saving shower heads and toilets. Check all taps for leaks and drips.

7. Thou Shall Lay Out the Rules

Don't just assume the extended family knows proper septic tank behavior. They probably don't. Unfortunately, it's not always the ideal topic for conversation.

Instead, think about putting up friendly septic signs as reminders in the bathrooms. Your guests may not even be aware you have a septic tank! Set your septic up for success.

8. Thou Shall Only Plant Septic Safe Plants & Trees

No one enjoys a dirt patch for a yard—and it's not a requirement for septic system owners. In fact, plants, flowers, and trees help reduce soil erosion and regulate moisture. It's all about knowing what plants and trees are safe for your septic tank and how far away to plant them.

The rule of thumb is simple: the smaller the better. Not just above ground, but below as well. Think small roots. Want some trees for shade? Look into the Dogwood Trees or a Japanese Maple Tree.

9. Thou Shall Not Park on the Septic Tank or Weeping Bed

Knowing roots can damage your septic system, it should not be a surprise that your car can too. Keep vehicles off your tank and weeping bed. Do not remove snow from your weeping bed as it protects it from freezing.

10. Thou Shall Help Protect Nearby Water Sources

An improperly working system doesn't just hurt you—it hurts the community too.

Water contamination occurs readily when your septic becomes overloaded or clogged. This contamination goes farther than the groundwater; it can get into the communities drinking water supply.

Protect nearby water sources by:

Inspecting your system regularly., Going phosphate free., Start composting., Upgrading your system.
Increasing your setbacks.

The Ten Commandments for septic system owners. May they help you keep your septic tank happy and healthy.