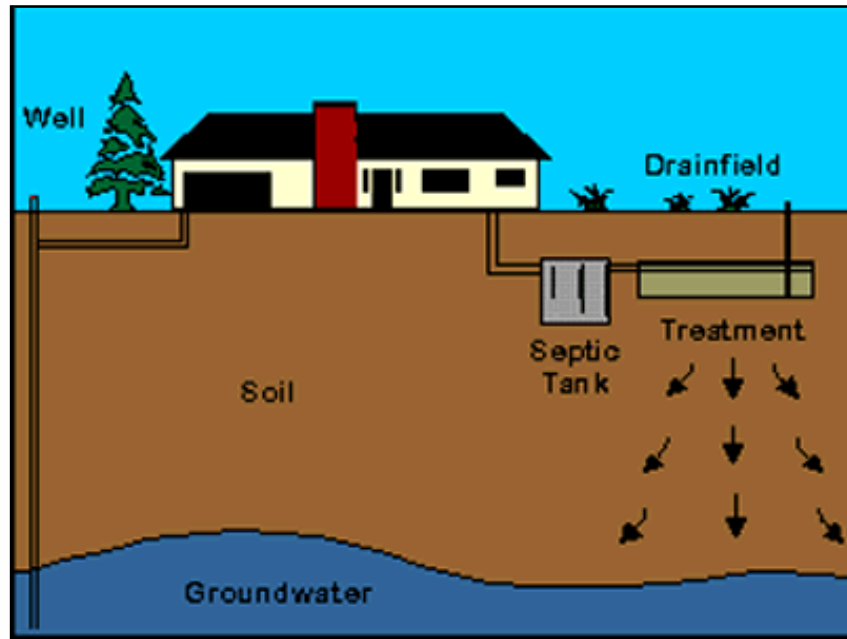


## MAINTAINING YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM

### Dynamics of Your Septic System

A septic system consists of two basic parts: a septic tank and a soil absorption field or drainfield. Wastewater from your home collects in a septic tank where solids settle to the bottom. Bacteria that live in the tank decompose the solids, turning them into thick sludge. The remaining solid-free liquid, carrying disease-causing organisms and liquid waste products, flows into the drainfield where it is further purified by filtration and decomposition by microorganisms in the soil. The semi-purified wastewater then percolates to the groundwater system.



### Maintaining Your Septic System

Septic systems are designed to have a lifetime of 20-30 years, under the best conditions. You should:

- Inspect for scum and sludge depth once each year.
- When the sludge level exceeds 1/3 of the tank volume, remove the sludge.
- Pump tank every 3-5 years.

The more water that flows through the septic system, the faster and more intense will be the release of nutrients into the ground. By conserving water, you will reduce nitrogen releases. The following are tips to help increase the efficiency and lifetime of your septic system:

- Limit water entering your tank

- Use water-saving fixtures (faucets, showers, toilets)
- Drain appliances one at a time
- Spread clothes washing over the entire week
- Minimize water used for bathing and dishwashing

**DON'T:**

- Connect roof, foundation or basement drainage to tank
- Connect basement sump pumps to tank
- Use a kitchen garbage disposal. Ground up waste does not decompose easily and can clog your system.
- Put harmful materials in tank such as: fats, solvents, oils, disinfectants, paints, and poisons. Some of these materials may kill the beneficial bacteria that make the system work.
- Put materials in tank such as paper towels, disposable diapers, feminine products

**Sources for More Information:**

- Michigan State University Extension Offices
- Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program
- Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association: [www.mowra.org](http://www.mowra.org)
- Northwest Michigan Onsite Wastewater Task Force:  
[www.michigan-onsitewastewater.org/](http://www.michigan-onsitewastewater.org/)
- Michigan State University Extension Water Quality Bulletins:
  - WQ-14: What to Do If Your Septic System Fails – <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod02/01500606.html>
  - WQ-16: How to Conserve Water in Your Home and Yard
  - WQ-15: Buying or Selling a Home? What to Find Out About Your Water and Septic Systems
  - WQ-13: Maintaining Your Septic System: Special Considerations For Shoreline Property Owners
  - WQ-39: Maintaining Your Septic System
  - MWPS-24: On-site Domestic Sewage Disposal Handbook