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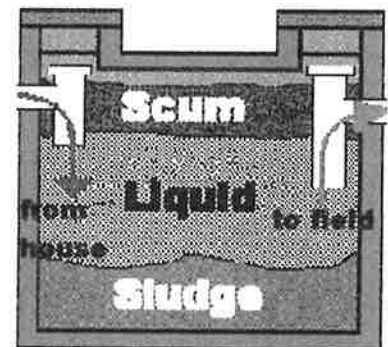
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How often you pump septic tanks depends

Q: How often should I pump a septic tank? Do additives do any good? Is yeast as good as the other expensive products.

A: You pump out your septic tank to get rid of the solid sludge that accumulates at the bottom of the tank and the grease floating near the top. Both sludge and grease can foul the leaching field. How often to pump out depends on your tank size, family size, and how much of your wastewater is solid.



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A septic tank.

For example: suppose your tank is 1,500 gallons, you've got four people in the family, and your solid waste is the average amount. Then you should pump your tank every 4 years. See the Montana's State University Guidelines in Further Surfing below. On the other hand, suppose there's only one person using a 1,500-gallon tank. Then pumping it every 19 years is fine. The number of people dumping wastewater down the drain makes a big difference in how often the tank needs pumping.

So does the size of the tank. Going back to our family of four, suppose the tank is a dinky 900 gallons. Then you better pump it about every 2 years, that is, twice as often as for a 1,500-gallon tank.

The volume of solids in the wastewater varies with such things as garbage disposals, dirty clothes, where you live. A family with a garbage disposal (compared with one that scrapes the dishes into a trash can) dumps up to 50 % more solid wastes down the drain, and, therefore, needs to pump the septic tank twice as often.

Additives don't do any good — or, at least, no controlled scientific study has shown them to be effective. So, save your money.

The reason why they don't work is simple. Some of the waste solids are sand, grit, plastic bits, and other non-organic junk. This stuff has to be pumped out. No enzyme or bacteria can digest them. Some other organic solids don't digest well so they accumulate.

When you add bacteria to the tank, the new bacteria have to compete with the established bacteria that are already adapted to the tank. The adapted ones have the home field advantage and, in general, eat the new ones.

Pump your tank, instead, every 3 to 5 years