



The Do's & Don'ts of
Beautifying
a Drain / Leach Field

This handout is compliments of Kuettel's Septic Service, LLC, N2057 Cty Rd T, Hortonville, WI 54944
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It is not uncommon for homeowners such as yourself to be concerned about the aesthetic effects of a septic system and leach field on your property. Many consider their drain field, especially if it is a mound system, to be eyesores and look for ways of beautifying them with flora and fauna. Perhaps you have limited space for gardening and do not want to waste the area where the drain field lies. Aesthetic beauty does, and should, be secondary to the primary job of the septic system, which is to "work" and to be "reliable". That is why we have put together this handout to educate you as a homeowner what you should or shouldn't plant over your drain (or leach) field.

Aside from attractiveness, there are some other very good reasons for planting certain types of foliage on a leach or drain field. A number of plants will assist the leach field by absorbing moisture and nutrients from the soil, all the while protecting from soil erosion. For those who aren't particularly fond of gardening, it is often recommended that, at the very least, leach and drain fields be densely covered with grass for the sake of these very benefits.

The challenge of planting on leach fields is really down to root control. Although plants can be good for the system, taking up moisture and organics naturally, the roots of certain types of plants can grow down around the perforations in the pipes. If the drain pipes get plugged, there are going to be serious and costly problems for you as a homeowner.

You need to consider first the soil in your yard and soils should be checked periodically for pH balance. It is also likely that the soil in the leach field area will have a high amount of salt, so it would be wise to consider using plants that are known to be salt and moisture tolerant and also have shallow roots that will not disrupt the piping below. Such plants include: arborvitae, hollyhocks, inkberry holly, red osier dogwood, violets, blueberries, daylily, chrysanthemum, delphinium, peony and rose. Flowering perennials and annuals are in most cases a good way to go.

It is debated whether or not vegetable gardens should be planted on or near leach fields. It is recommended that planting around the leach fields be merely for ornamental purposes and not for food. However, if one chooses to plant vegetables on a leach field, they should avoid planting any type of root vegetable such as potatoes and carrots over drain pipes. Species that grow on vines, such as cucumbers and tomatoes, should be grown on supporters above the

ground so they do not have contact with the soil. All vegetables should be washed thoroughly before eaten raw or cooked.

Although trees can be quite lovely, they are dangerous for a leach field and should be planted as far from the pipes as possible. It is important you as a homeowner understand this because the damage of roots could make installing a new pipe system unavoidable.

There are certain types of trees that are more precarious than others. Water-loving trees such as poplars and willows and have been rightly accused of destroying many leach fields over the years. Homeowners must keep these trees far from pipes, unless you are prepared for the cost and emotional stress of the installation of a new system! On the other hand, smaller trees such as dogwoods might not do too much harm, but with trees it is always a risk. Some rooted bushes such as boxwood or holly may be a safer option as well.

Ultimately, it would be best for leach fields to plant trees as far away as the estimated root growth. This can be determined by considering the average height of a mature tree of that particular kind, and then plant the tree that many feet away from the pipes. So if a type of tree generally grows 20 feet tall, then it should be planted no less than 20 feet from the leach field. Even the more non-aggressive trees should be planted no closer than 10 feet away.

When planting trees near drain or leach fields, we advise you to prepare the soil well in the direction opposite the pipes. Dig deep to loosen up the soil below, as roots will tend to travel the path of least resistance when the soil is compacted. The piping may be the area of least resistance which could be problematic. Another option to control root growth would be to install some sort of root barrier in the direction of the pipes.

There are many options available to you as a homeowner with a leach field and green thumbs. We hope that this information has been helpful to you to make wise choices how to "beautify" your drain / leach field area! If there is ever any questions we can assist you in answering, feel free to call our office and we will do our best to direct you in your decisions!

#### Recommended Trees to Plant Near Drain / Leach Fields:

- Dogwood
- Pines
- Cherries
- Oaks
- Sourwood

#### Trees to Avoid Near Drain / Leach Fields:

- Willows
- Poplars
- Beeches
- Elms
- Red & Silver Maples