

SEPTIC LANDSCAPING RESOURCE GUIDE (by Scott Chase, November 2020)

TIPS FOR LANDSCAPING THE DRAINFIELD

- Drainfield components may only be six inches deep. Avoid rototilling and deep digging. Look out for filter fabric, drain lines, or drain rock when planting. Keep extra water away from the drain field, (e.g. rain gardens, downspouts, irrigation, etc.)
- Keep cars, livestock, pavement and buildings off the drainfield area. No playground equipment or kiddie pools.
- Avoid trenching and keep drains, sprinkler system or retaining walls at least 30 feet away from the septic system.
- Never cover any part of the drainfield with landscape plastic.

Trees / large shrubs: Trees and shrubs generally have extensive root systems that seek out water and can grow into drainfields. When planting trees and shrubs, remember that roots can spread the same distance from a plant as the height of the plant. Plant trees at least 30 feet away from the drainfield.

Western red cedar, alder, redwood, poplar, maple and willow trees seek out water. These should be avoided or planted a minimum of 50 feet away.

Growing vegetables or fruits over a drainfield is not recommended. It is not recommended to grow vegetables or fruit trees over a drainfield because they need regular heavy watering and they can come into contact with sewage in the drainfield. Rototilling or deep digging can also damage septic system pipes. Plants to avoid: English ivy, blackberry and other noxious weeds

Lawns: Grasses with their shallow root systems are the simplest and most frequently recommended plantings over the drainfield. Choose a traditional lawn (remember to fertilize only in the spring and fall, if at all), or choose an un-mowed meadow. You may include permeable pathways, garden ornaments, bird baths, sundials, tables and benches. If a mowed lawn is your priority, use grass seed mixes suitable for our Northwest climate, and mixed specifically for sun or shade depending on the site of the drainfield.

Meadows: Wildflower meadows are frequently suggested for drainfields, but in reality they are difficult to maintain. Perennial seeds in the meadow mixes, such as lupines, tend to take over and the annual seeds included with the mixes do not always reseed in subsequent years. If you wish to try a wildflower meadow mix, make sure the plants are selected for the Northwest and that the mix does not contain seeds or plants on the Washington State Noxious Weed list. The use of small bulbs with the wildflowers, such as small daffodil and crocus bulbs, are easy to naturalize and will return year after year. You may also want to try one of the various "eco"

lawn mixes available through Northwest nurseries and catalogs. These typically are a blend of grasses and wildflowers that require a minimum of water, fertilizer and mowing.

Perennial Gardens: In sunnier locations, perennial gardens can be created with mixes of ornamental grasses of different heights and can be inter-planted with ground covers, small bulbs, and sun loving perennials as well as smaller, shallow rooted shrubs.

Ornamental Grasses: Larger grasses are known to harm septic fields. Avoid Miscanthus, pampas grass and bamboo. Smaller ornamental grasses, evergreen or deciduous, are fine.

Planting over a Glendon Biofilter Mound System:

Glendon Biofilter septic systems consist of a septic tank, pump tank and above ground mounds over the basins used to filter the effluent from the tanks. These mounds are conspicuous and challenging to landscape.

Many homeowners block off the view of the mound area with hedge plantings or decorative fencing. Care should be taken that the plants chosen for a hedge should be kept four feet away from the mounds to allow for maintenance of both the mounds and the hedge. The plants chosen should not have aggressive runners or roots. Avoid hedges of any of the native evergreen trees such as western red cedar and hemlock. Laurels should also be avoided. Use more "friendly" plants such as California wax myrtle (*Myrica californica*) or smaller, slower growing boxwoods. The wax myrtle will grow tall and may need to be pruned.

It is desirable to plant the mounds with a ground cover type of plant to prevent erosion of the sand and to help them blend into the landscaping. There are many ground cover plants available in the nurseries and their tags will tell which are suitable for sun or shade. Examples of suitable plants for ground cover on the mounds are coastal strawberry (*Frageria chiloensis*); kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*); wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*); creeping bramble (*Rubus pentalobus*); sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and dwarf periwinkle (*Vinca minor*).

Some Good Online Resources:

Great Plant Picks: www.greatplantpicks.org A regional plant awards program designed to help the home gardener identify unbeatable plants for their maritime Pacific Northwest

Native Plant Guide: <http://green.kingcounty.gov/GoNative/index.aspx> A searchable guide to Western Washington native plants and native plant gardening tips, courtesy of King County

Shore Stewards News: <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2144/2014/12/2014-Landscaping-Septic-System-Drainfields-and-Mounds-Issue-98.pdf> (Or just Google "Shore Stewards Drainfield Landscaping" and you'll find links". This is a newsletter with lots of suggestions and guides about planting over your drainfield. (Written by class speaker, Scott Chase, in 2014)

Mason County guide listing plants and covers appropriate for a Western Washington drainfield:
https://www.co.mason.wa.us/oakland-bay/pdfs/landscaping_drainfield.pdf

WSU Extension Clark County Landscaping for Septic Systems
<https://extension.wsu.edu/clark/naturalresources/smallacreageprogram/landscaping-for-septic-systems/>

Planting over a Septic System, Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #98, Washington State University, Snohomish County Extension

Landscaping Your Septic System, by Teri King and Jodie Holdcroft, Sea Grant Washington

Drainfield Landscaping Suggestions: Shallow Rooted Plants, Clallam County Environmental Health Services

Landscaping Your Drainfield, Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Environmental Health Division

Drainfield Landscaping Suggestions: SHALLOW ROOTED PLANTS

Herbaceous annuals: Ageratum (Ageratum housetonianum), Wax Begonia (Begonia semperflorens), Coleus (Coleus species), Lobelia (Lobelia ertinus), Sweet Alysum (Lobularia maritima), Geranium (Pelargonium x hortorum), Petunia (Petunia x hybrida), Salvia (Salvia species), Marigold (Tagetes patula), Zinnia (Zinnia elegans)

Herbaceous perennials: Amaria, Seathrift (Amaria maritima), Astilbe (Astilbe x arendsii), Basket of Gold (Aurinia saxatilis) – can also be used as a ground cover, Campanula (Campanula species), Snow in Summer (Cerastium tomentosum), Lily of the Valley (Convallaria majalis), Sweet William (Dianthus barbatus), Cottage (and other), Pinks (Dianthus species), Coral Bell (Hauseria sanguinea), Candytuft (Iberis sempervirens), Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia), – evergreen Moss Pink (Phlox subulata)

Ground covers (all perennial): Carpet Bugle (Ajuga reptans), Kennickinick (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi), Irish Moss (Arenaria verna), Bunchberry (Comus canadensis), Blue Fescue (Festuca ovina glauca), Wintergreen (Gaultheria procumbens), Salal (Gaultheria shallon), Lydia Broom (Genista lydia), Pachysandra (Pachysandra terminalis) – shaded areas only, Sword Fern (Polystichum munitum), Stone Crop (Sedum species), Hens and Chicks (Sempervivum tectorum), Periwinkle (Vinca Minor), Thyme (Thymus species)