

Landscape Guidelines for Nonstandard Septic Systems

WLS-017

Purpose: To provide landscaping guidelines for nonstandard septic systems.

Vegetative cover is intended to prevent erosion of the soil over nonstandard septic systems such as mound, at-grade and pressure distribution systems. It also assists with a natural means of evapotranspiration of the sewage effluent from the system. These types of septic systems create a special set of conditions due to the way they function. The placement of the gravel bed creates a drought area directly above on the top of the mound while the application of effluent produces wetter than ordinary soils immediately below. Since nonstandard septic systems tend to be relatively dry on top, they are most conducive to planting native grasses, herbaceous plants, various bulbs, succulents, herbs and other ornamental ground covers that are drought resistant or drought tolerant. All plants covering a nonstandard septic system shall be drought resistant and have non-invasive root systems to prevent damage and/or failure of the septic system. Attached is a suggested list of various plants suitable for planting directly on your nonstandard septic system. This is only a partial list and you may want to consult a landscape professional for other plant selections who should be advised of the nonstandard septic system.

Landscape Guidelines:

Vegetation management is essential to proper maintenance and monitoring of these types of systems.

Do not plant trees or large shrubs directly on a mound or at-grade system or within the area of any nonstandard leach field.

Do not plant a lawn that requires heavy watering, such as bluegrass. It is best to plant drought tolerant grasses such as various types of fescues.

Do not plant ivy or ice plant as they retain moisture thereby restricting evapotranspiration which will keep the system too wet. Ivy and ice plant both have very invasive root systems and are prohibited on any type of septic system.

Do not use overhead "Rainbird" type sprinklers. The irrigation method of choice is drip irrigation which will minimally provide enough irrigation for the plants while keeping the system as dry as possible.

Do not promote activities on the system that will add to soil compaction and loss of absorption capacity.

Do not drive across the system.

Do not cut or mow vegetation when the soil is wet. Remove clippings promptly.

Do not allow large animals on the system area.

Do not cover valve boxes and performance wells.

Do not operate equipment on system when soil is wet.

Please Note: Heavy equipment or vehicles driven over the system may damage it.

Suggested Plant List for Nonstandard Sewage Disposal Systems

Herbaceous Plants	Common Name	Color	Height	Comments
Achillea species	Yarrow	Y,W,R	12 inches	fire retardant
Arctotheca calendula	Cape Weed	Y	6 inches	spreads
Artemisia schmidtiana	Silver Mound	Y	2 feet	
Centaurea cyanus	Bachelor's Buttons	B,P,R,W	1-2 feet	
Cosmos bipinnatus	Cosmos	R,Y	3-6 feet	easy
Cosmos sulphureus	Yellow Cosmos	Y	3-4 feet	easy
Diplacus species	Monkey Flower	many	1-3 feet	
Dietes iridiodes	Fortnight Lily	W	4 feet	tough
Erigeron karvinskianus	Fleabane	W,P	1-2 feet	drought tolerant
Eschscholzia californica	California Poppy	O,R	1-2 feet	spreads
Festuca ovina glauca	Blue Fescue	X	12 inches	spreads
Hemerocallis species	Daylilies	many	1-6 feet	easy
Lantana montevidensis	Trailing Lantana	R	1-2 feet	spreads
Lobularia maritima	Sweet Alyssum	W	6-12 inches	spreads
Myosotis sylvatica	Forget-Me-Not	B	6-12 inches	profuse
Oenothera species	Mexican Evening Primrose	R,W,Y	1-2 feet	tough
Santolina species	Santolina	Y,W	1-3 feet	aromatic
Stachys byzantia	Lamb's Ears	Pur.	12 inches	spreads
Tropaeolum majus	Nasturtium	O,R,Y,W	12 inches	spreads
Verbena species	Verbena	varies	1-3 feet	
Zauschneria californica	California Fuchsia	R	1-2 feet	drought tolerant

Bulbs	Common Name	Color	Height	Comments
Amaryllis belladonna	Naked Lady	P	3 feet	hardy
Crocasmia crocosmiiflora	Montbretia	R	2 feet	hardy
Iris species	Iris	many	1-2 feet	drainage
Narcissus species	Daffodil	Y,W	1-2 feet	reproduces
Tulipa species	Tulip	many	1-2 feet	tough

Succulents and Herbs

Many to choose from; very drought tolerant

Woody Ground Covers	Common Name	Color	Height	Comments
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi	Ground Cover Manzanita	W	1-2 feet	to 15 feet
Baccharis pilularis	Dwarf chaparral broom	W	1-2 feet	tough
Ceanothus species	various prostrate forms	B	1-2 feet	spreads
Cotoneaster species	various prostrate forms	R	6-12 inches	tough
Juniperus species	various prostrate forms	Y	1-2 feet	spreads
Rosemarinum officinalis	Prostrate Rosemary	B	1-2 feet	tough

Color Key: B=Blue O=Orange P=Pink Pur.=Purple R=Red W=White Y=Yellow