

Tree Roots

Tree roots can enter sewage and drainfield lines and cause plugging of the lines. Lines should not be placed near trees, and trees should not be planted near lines. Remove tree roots mechanically or flush copper sulfate crystals down the toilet to help discourage or destroy the roots where the solution comes in contact with them. Some time must elapse before the roots are killed and broken off. Recommended dosage rates are two pounds per 300 gallons of tank capacity. No more than two applications per year are recommended. Time the application of copper sulfate to allow minimum dilution and maximum contact time. Copper sulfate will corrode chrome, iron and brass, so avoid contact with these materials. Used in recommended dosage, copper sulfate will not interfere with septic tank operation. Neither mechanical removal nor copper sulfate contact is a permanent solution for tree roots. Remove the trees for a permanent solution to the problem.

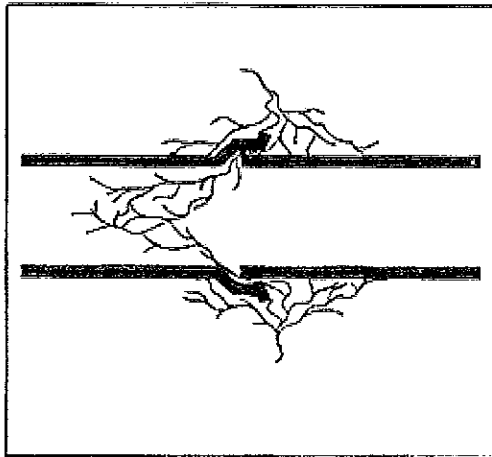


Figure 3. Trees should never be located near the absorption trenches.

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Consider using root barriers. Another effective, although expensive, technique that may be worth trying is installing a root barrier between your drainage field and tree plantings. Geotextiles, impregnated with a long-lasting herbicide that moves only a short distance in the soil, have been used successfully to restrict root growth in street tree plantings. To effectively stop tree roots, the barrier should extend from the soil surface to a depth of at least 2 feet. Some roots may still grow under the barrier, but intrusion into the drain field should be greatly reduced. Install the barrier fabric at least 3 feet from the drain field so as not to disrupt the system. Allow at least 5 feet (the more the better) between the tree and the root barrier - more if it will be a very large tree. Finally, never encircle the tree with the barrier material; this could effectively containerize your tree and prevent it from thriving.

Instead, run the material the entire length of the drain field to prevent roots from getting into the field by going around the barrier.

Virginia Cooperative Extension

How Close Can I Plant Trees?

The rule of thumb is that a tree's roots are as wide as the tree's canopy (branch spread). But this doesn't account for all species of trees, or the depth of the roots. When it comes to a septic system, it is best to only have grass planted above and around the system. Shallow rooted plants (ask your local Cooperative Extension expert or the Nursery employees), small shrubs, and flowers usually can be safely planted near and above the system. But trees really should be avoided. A weeping willow tree, or other species that really have a massive root system should NEVER be planted ANYWHERE near a septic system!

Should I Use a Chemical To Remove Tree Roots?

NO! You must always keep in mind whatever chemical you flush down your drains or put into your septic tank, you are **DIRECTLY POURING INTO YOUR DRINKING WATER!!** Your septic system dumps it's wastewater, and all the chemicals you have flushed into it, directly into ground water. This is the water you drink! And if you have a well in your yard for your drinking water (which most people on septic systems do), you are pouring chemicals into that well. The offending trees should be removed, along with mechanical removal of the roots.

Maryland Cooperative Extension