



## Septic System Cleaners

The general rule of thumb about septic system starters, feeders, cleaners and other additives is: If they are safe to use, they are probably not effective; and if they are effective, they are probably not safe to use. There is no quick fix or good substitute for proper septic tank operation and regular maintenance.

A "starter" is not needed to start bacterial action in the septic tank. There are numerous bacteria present in wastewater. It is also not necessary to "feed" the system with additional bacteria, yeast preparations or other home remedies. We feed the system every time we use it.

Septic tank "cleaners," intended to remove solids from the tank, will probably damage the soil treatment system. Many additives agitate the solids that should float to the top or settle to the bottom of the tank. This agitation suspends the solids. It allows them to be flushed into the drainfield. There they clog pipes and soil pores, leading to partial or complete failure of the system. This can result in the need for a costly replacement of the soil treatment system.

Other additives, particularly degreasers, may contain carcinogens. These cancer-causing agents flow directly into the groundwater with the treated sewage.

Minnesota Rules Chapter 7080, titled "Individual Sewage Treatment Systems Program," bans septic system additives which contain hazardous materials. In addition, it specifies additives must not be used to reduce the frequency of proper septic system maintenance.

EPA or USDA approval of additives means the product contains no hazardous materials. It does not mean the product is effective at what the manufacturer claims it will do.

For more information, call your local Extension office or county health department. More detailed information on the use and care of septic systems is available in the "[Septic System Owner's Guide](#)," Extension Publication.