

Installation of Access Risers

Basic septic system maintenance involves looking into your septic tank (and pump chamber if you have one), and risers provide easy access for maintenance and repair. The steps below explain how to install access risers.

1. Locate your tank

You will need a copy of your “[as-built](#)” drawing done at the time of installation, a shovel, a probing tool, eye protection and work gloves. (If you do not have a copy of your as-built, you may fax in a request for an as-built to 417-2313.) (If an as-built is not available, you may want to contact a professional to locate your tank.) Identify the location of your tank on the as-built. Using the probing tool, gently poke around the area of the septic tank until you hit concrete. Septic tanks may be buried 6 inches to 5 feet below ground. **WARNING:** Underground power or other utility pipes or cables could be near or over your septic tank, and if you hit a power line it could be deadly! Make sure you have any electrical utilities located before you begin digging by calling 1-800-424-5555.



Shovel and
probe tool

2. Dig up the ground over your tank

Once you have located your septic tank, begin digging.¹ The dimensions of the tank are normally about 6 feet wide by 8 feet long. Dig out the entire top of the tank and remove rocks and dirt around the lid openings. You should have two openings, over the inlet (from the house) and the outlet (into the drainfield or pump chamber). Or you may have one large lid in the middle and one small lid on one end. Septic tank configurations can vary, so if your tank is completely different than these examples you may want to contact a [professional](#). The inlet side is typically the one closest to the house.

There will be a concrete lid over the inlet and outlet openings, and **you want a riser for each opening**. Remove the concrete lids and discard them. You will not need concrete lids once risers are installed.



3. Install riser and lid

Caution: If septic tank is 20 years old or older, it is advisable to pump the tank to verify its structural integrity and water-tightness. If the tank needs serious repairs, it is better to replace it with a modern septic tank and include risers with the installation. Replacing a septic tank requires a [repair permit](#) from the local health department.

More Caution: Once the lids are off be careful around the tank. Let someone know where you are in case you have an accident. It is best to do the work with another person present. Be aware that exposure to sewage can cause serious illness, so make sure you wear gloves and wash up afterwards with plenty of soap and water. You may also want to wear eye protection in case you get splash back from debris falling into a tank. Make sure that pets and children are kept away from the tank while it is open, you don't want them falling into the tank either

There are different types of PVC risers available. You can purchase the PVC risers and lids at a local plumbing store or from a septic tank manufacturer. Risers are normally 24 inches in diameter and can easily fit over the tank hole opening. Some tanks have square openings so fitting a round riser over the square opening can be tricky.

Measure the depth to the top of the tank and purchase or order the risers accordingly. Some are cut to order based on the height you need, and some come in 6-12-inch increments. You may install the risers so that they are flush with the surface of the ground or sticking out above ground by a few inches (if a riser is above ground make sure you are careful when mowing).



Clean off the top of the tank, removing all dirt and debris. Use a high strength flexible concrete patch mix that hardens in 15-20 minutes (such as Jet-Set, Rapid-Set, Thorough-Set or Perco-Plug). Use heavy duty leather gloves when handling these products and mix according to instructions – Note: making a small amount at a time is best. This stuff hardens FAST. Seal the riser to the septic tank using the patch mix. You may finish sealing by adding Bentonite or casing sealer around the base, filling in gaps as needed.

Now make sure you carefully secure the riser lid with screws provided.



Of course, if you are unsure of doing this work yourself you may hire a professional to locate your system, install risers and lids, and perform maintenance. You can access a current list of licensed [OSS professionals](#) from Environmental Health's Onsite Septic Webpage.

Riser installation directions borrowed, in part, from Thurston County Environmental Health.

¹ NOTE: Septic tank risers are normally installed in pairs. If you find one – and only one – riser already installed then it is most likely a pressurized system. A single riser is required for accessing the pump chamber for this type of system. If you don't have two additional risers, you should locate your septic tank and install risers for both the inlet and outlet openings, as described above.