

1-27-12 Better than the Good Old Days

Growing up in South Weymouth in the 50's and 60's was a time for do it yourselfers long before we dreamed that DIY might be a television show, magazine or website. Well, we weren't even dreaming of websites. A transistor radio was pretty cool, though.

Our cellars had workbenches and above the workbench was a shelf with jars underneath for holding screws, nuts and washers. The metal cover would be screwed to the underside of the shelf, allowing for easy viewing and easy access to the contents. We didn't call it re-using or recycling. We just called it not wasting and being thrifty and practical.

Do it yourself projects were not limited to carpentry, school projects (My father made the best!) or go carts, though. They also included fixing up that back yard septic system. My back yard had a couple weeping willow trees. They were not natives to the yard. I am sure my father transplanted them from nearby wetlands and riverbed surrounding the neighborhood. Weeping willows love being near the water. They also loved those septic system trenches in my back yard. In fact, as they grew bigger and bigger, you might think they could prevent the system from going into failure by being an extension of the leaching area. Or, I suppose the massive root system might clog it up, too. In any case, the day came when more capacity and better drainage was needed, (or was it that several more children had arrived?) and, so, out came the shovels and wheel barrows.

I don't recall a septic tank ever being pumped or even knowing the term septic tank. Perhaps it was just a cesspool, which is a cylindrical underground container with holes on the sides to allow sewage to flow out. However, I do recall the day my father and some other men dug three trenches and filled them with crushed stone. He was satisfied with the results of his labor and continued to enjoy the shade of the willow.

That trench and stone system was pretty good and the same basic design is still used today. Other designs from earlier time periods, including single cesspools, metal tanks, fifty gallon drums and old cars (I kid you not!) are not used today and for good reason. We have put aside methods and/or designs that are not safe, like the metal tanks, and any method that is harmful to the groundwater, such as the cesspool. The cesspool can harm the groundwater by leaching sewage out and into the groundwater without any sort of treatment or even settling. In fact, they are so good at that bad thing, that they last a long time by being flushed in and flushed out, much like an underground toilet. This is great for households using one but very harmful to the environment, allowing bacteria into the groundwater.

Our State Department of Environmental Protection decided it was time to change that back in 1995 by requiring septic system inspections at the time of change in ownership and, also by requiring a new method of keeping systems out of the groundwater. From thence forward,

health agents and designers of systems would learn about soil evaluation and would keep the bottom of the leaching area at least four feet above the groundwater at its seasonally highest time. That seasonal high water leaves marks in the soil called redoximorphic features, referred to as mottles.

A few years later, DEP decided to reward those who repaired and upgraded their septic systems, and thus, protecting our groundwater, with a tax credit. A tax credit is money returned to you and that is way better than trying to figure out tax deductions. If you are living in your house when it is repaired (read: “replaced”), you are eligible for a \$1,500 septic repair credit for up to four years or up to 40% of the total cost.

In the good old days we did it our own way, even if it wasn’t a good way. Our reward was the satisfaction of self reliance. In the current day we do it the right way and, in this case, we are rewarded with cash. We do have to list it as income the following year but, still, it’s a good deal. Get it while it is still here! The Septic Repair Credit is really easy, too!

Sometimes being rewarded for doing the right thing is a really good thing. This is one of those times.

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