

Calcium dissolved out of limestone, for example, makes water “hard;” soap doesn’t get very sudsy and thick white deposits accumulate on pots and pans and water heaters. But the hard water tastes a lot better than groundwater with dissolved iron in it, a problem that can occur with just about any kind of rock because so many rocks contain iron.

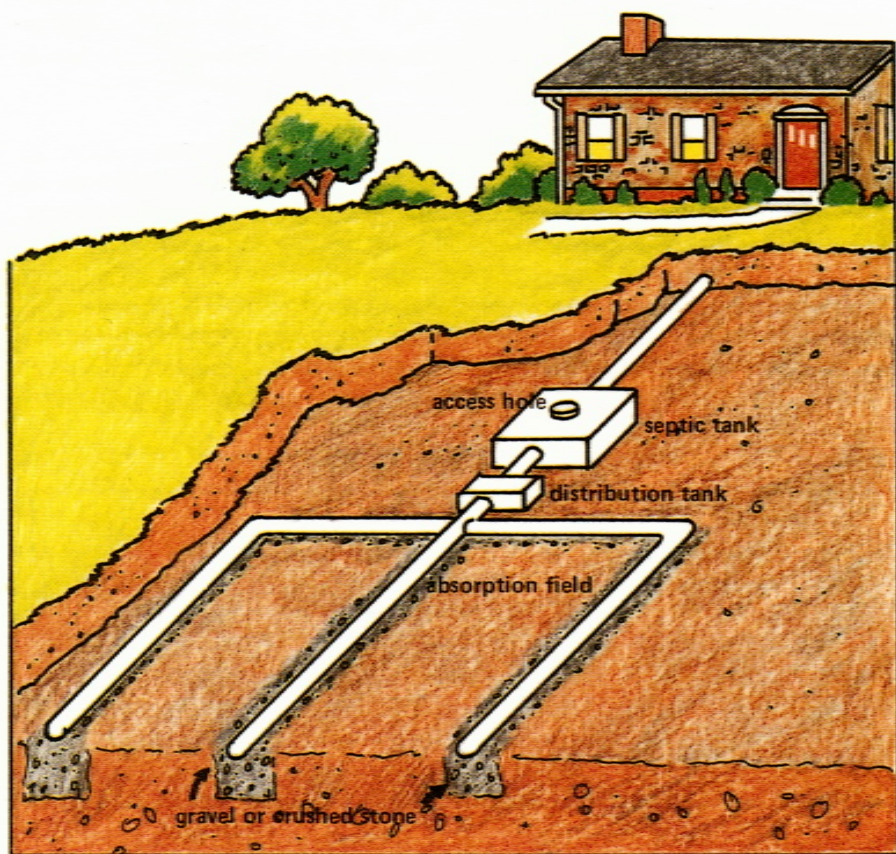
The kinds of minerals in groundwater will depend on the kinds of rocks there are in the area. How much of some mineral the groundwater has depends mostly on how long the water was in contact with the rock. The longer the contact, the more chances groundwater has to dissolve out a mineral.

Septic systems

But a lot of the contaminants in our groundwater are there because of people.

One very common groundwater problem comes from untreated sewage (what you flush down the toilet) leaking into the ground. It comes from damaged sewer lines or from septic tanks that aren’t working quite the way they should.

Those of us who live in towns or cities usually depend on municipal water and sewer systems. But rural families often live too far away from town to hook up to those systems. Instead, they have their own water supplies (wells) and sewage treatment (septic tank systems).



Cutaway view of a typical septic system.

