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REAL ESTATE IN SHAPE: Reuse gray water, rain to limit waste

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March 11, 2007 12:15 am

Question: What exactly is gray water?

Georg and Miranda Efird, A2Z Plumbing: Any water that has been used in the home, except water from toilets, is called gray water. Dish, shower, sink and laundry water comprise 50 percent to 80 percent of residential “waste” water. This may be reused for other purposes, especially landscape irrigation and toilet flushing. We can reduce the amount of fresh water wasted with a gray water system, and our gardens will thrive with luscious plant life by using water with small bits of compost in it.

Q: What exactly is rainwater harvesting, and how does this system work?

A: Rainwater harvesting is the collection of rainwater that would otherwise have gone down the drainage system, into the ground or been lost to the atmosphere through evaporation. Large surfaces like roofs or driveways are perfect for collecting rainwater and reusing it to flush the toilet, water gardens and even fuel the washing. A holding tank is inexpensive and easy to install into a residence. Usually the holding tank or barrel size needed for a residence is 60 gallons. The tank has a control unit that monitors the water level and if the water level drops too low, the system switches to the main water supply and if it gets too high, an overflow trap allows floating material to be skimmed off to a storm drain or sewer drain.

Q: If I cannot afford to install a gray water or rain harvesting system at this time, are there other ways I can save money on my water bill?

A: Yes, of course. In addition to our list of 10 ways to conserve water, here are two relatively inexpensive ways of saving money on your water bill:

- Water that is wasted down the toilet every time you flush can be reduced by a third by having a device installed into your toilet that conserves water. You can save up to 3,000 gallons of water from going down the drain every year without affecting the way your toilet flushes. The water-saving device costs between \$145 and \$200 to install, including material and labor.
- Rain barrels can be purchased at any hardware store. Place the barrel under a gutter or location where a good amount of water falls when it's raining and then reuse the rainwater to water your indoor plants and garden. This alone will save hundreds of gallons of fresh water in the summer months when your garden is thirstiest.

Visit our Web site for a complete list of services and ways to conserve water at www.eatsleepplumb.com or e-mail a2zasheville@eatsleepplumb.com to contact Georg about your project.

10 ways to conserve water (www.eatsleepplumb.com)

1. A leaky faucet can waste hundreds of gallons per day. Call your plumber to repair leaking faucets and pipes.

2. One flush of a standard toilet uses 1.6 gallons of water. Ask us about fluid masters that can save about 4,200 gallons of water per year per toilet at a cost of about \$45. Also ask about gray water systems that use your shower, tub and washing machine water to flush toilets.
3. Try to take showers most of the time and use a timer. The average five-minute shower uses 15 to 25 gallons of water. Depending on your shower head, reducing a daily shower from 10 to five minutes can save 5,475 to 19,250 gallons of water per year.
4. Instead of drinking bottled water or filling a glass from the tap each time you are thirsty, fill your favorite pitcher with water and store in the refrigerator. Use one drinking glass per day to reduce the amount of dishes to wash.
5. Turn the faucet off while brushing teeth, lathering hands, shaving, and washing dishes. Only do large/full loads of dishes and clothes in your dishwasher and washing machine.
6. Use a broom to clean your driveway, porch, patio and sidewalk instead of the water hose. You could save 80 gallons of water each time.
7. Know where your main water shut off valve is. If a pipe bursts you will be able to turn off water to your home or business and save thousands of gallons of water.
8. Leave buckets out to catch rainwater and use for watering your garden.
9. Avoid using ornamental water features that spray water into the air, reducing the amount of water lost to evaporation. Don't purchase recreational water toys that require a constant flow of water.
10. Be conscious of your water usage and take steps every day to save our depleting precious resources. Visit www.wateruseitwisely.com/index.shtml.

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