**What is Graywater?**

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A reader asked the question: "What is graywater?" He and his neighbor were discussing water bills at a break in a neighborhood barbeque and the neighbor’s bill was much less because he used his “graywater.” The inquirer wanted to know if he should be frightened of his neighbor’s “graywater” use or should he be using it himself!

Graywater is the untreated water from your washing machine, bathroom sink and shower/bathtub. It is a safe and perfectly good way to reduce the amount of potable (expensive) water that is used to irrigate your landscape.

If you figure that each person in a household produces about 40 gallons of graywater every day, then if there are three of you, that would be about 840 gallons per week.

Eight hundred and forty gallons is plenty of water to irrigate a xeriscape, low water landscape made up of groundcovers, perennials, shrubs and hardscape. It is roughly about 25 percent of the water that a homeowner would require each week to keep a typical lawn green all summer.

In an experiment at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, Texas A&M engineers have determined it costs between $100 and $400 to retrofit your plumbing to use the graywater for irrigation. They will be publishing the information in a bulletin sometime in July or you can visit Mitchell Lake on Aug. 16 at 9 a.m. for the first of several educational events at the site.

In addition to the plumbing set up, there is a garden with 12 months of native plant color irrigated with graywater to show how easy it is to use.

The simplest system uses a hose to put the graywater on the lawn or in the garden from the retrofitted connection. You just move the hose end to a different part of the lawn every day. It is most efficient to use it to replace one or more whole sprinkler zones. Cap the designated sprinkler head and rely on graywater.

If you have zoysia, buffalo or Bermuda grass you could let the lawn beyond the amount of water available from graywater go dormant. Then you would really save water and reduce the water bill. The dormant grass will green up just as soon as the rain resumes.

Graywater can also be used in a more elaborate scheme. If you have storage, a simple filter system and a small pump, the graywater can be used to feed a drip irrigation system for the flower garden, container plants or even the vegetable garden.

Not every plumber is an advocate for an inexpensive, simple graywater system but as long as you comply with some simple rules, graywater is safe and does not require an expensive infrastructure.

Graywater can be used for flood or drip irrigation. It cannot be sprayed into the air.

Your household’s graywater must stay in your own yard and it cannot sit in puddles for any significant period of time.

I am sure you have noted that graywater does not include waste water from the toilet or from the kitchen sink or dishwasher.

If you wash baby diapers in the washing machine on a continuous basis, the water from the washing machine should also be passed into the sanitary sewer rather than be used for irrigation.

San Antonians have a great record of reducing water use at the household level and graywater is another option for us to add to our water conservation success plus it will reduce water bills.

**Gardening Tasks**

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Consider pulling your old spent tomatoes from the spring planting. They are more likely to produce spider mites and fungus than a fall crop of tomatoes. Plant a new set of tomato plants in early August for fall production.

It is not too late to convert some of your lawn to a low water use planting and take advantage of the SAWS Landscape Coupon. Visit [www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org) and click to conservation for the requirements.

Dead areas in the lawn could be caused by dryness, chinch bugs or grubs. Hand water the area and if it does not green-up treat with a soil insecticide.

Search out any standing water in your yard and eliminate it to reduce mosquito production. A spray of malathion, pyrethrum, or even spinosad into dense brush thickets will also reduce mosquitoes.