

Graywater: Tap into 40 gallons for landscape irrigation by Darrel Dacus

As homeowners look for ways to reduce water consumption, the use of graywater is growing. Graywater, by definition, is untreated used water from bath tubs/showers, vanity sinks, and clothes washers that has never come in contact with blackwater (toilet, kitchen sink, and dishwasher drain water). Residents planning to build a new home have the opportunity to install a whole home graywater recovery system.

Unfortunately, existing homes with a concrete slab foundation really only have the option of using clothes washer drain water, provided it is located on an exterior wall. Installing a recovery system on an existing home with a concrete slab, if even possible, would be too cost prohibitive.

There are several things to consider before installing a graywater system. Texas Administrative Code Section 210 (Use of Reclaimed Water) lays out very specific requirements for the installation and use of a graywater system. Before undertaking this project homeowners should be very familiar with these guidelines and hire licensed professionals also current with the law. Graywater systems should not be considered if the home is equipped with a water softener, as the salinity level will be much too high for use around the landscape. Also, powdered detergents, and those containing boron, contain chemicals which can be harmful to plants and grasses. Laundry detergents are alkaline, so the addition of supplements to lower the Ph may benefit plants.

The use of graywater is a great way to supplement potable water. It can be used to maintain moisture around the foundation, irrigate landscape beds from below ground, or fill watering cans for potted plants. It should not be used on vegetables, around pools, or where it can "puddle" after being applied. Studies have shown that the clothes washer graywater alone, from a family of four, can average 40 - 60 gallons a day.