

Using Gray Water to Save Water

Why we care

Oregon is known for its rainy winters, but our summers are just the opposite. Reducing water use, especially during the peak dry spell, can lower your water and sewer bill, help maintain stream flows for fish, and save energy required to pump ground water.

Simple, positive steps

Using gray water (from baths, showers, sinks, and laundry) is one way to reduce water use. Until last fall, legally discharging gray water into a yard was prohibitively expensive. However, Oregon has simplified the permitting process to encourage gray-water use. Now, a single-family household may use untreated gray water for subsurface irrigation--a drip system covered with mulch, a perforated pipe, or mulched trenches. Here are questions to ask yourself: Do I have access to the drain pipes for laundry, showers, or sinks? Do I have trees or shrubs that could use the water? Graphics showing sample systems can be found at [San Francisco Gray Water Guide](#) or [New Mexico Gray Water Guide](#). The system will need a valve to send water to sewer pipes during the rainy season because runoff could contaminate surface water or create a public health hazard.

A DEQ permit is required along with a plan showing the location and design of the system, the intended use, and fixtures that will be used in diversion of gray water. Visit the Oregon DEQ's [Water Reuse Program page](#) for specifics.

Using gray water to flush toilets only can be done with a simple plumbing permit. See the [Water Conservation Systems Oregon Smart Guide](#) for more information.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.