

**DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL**

# Going gray

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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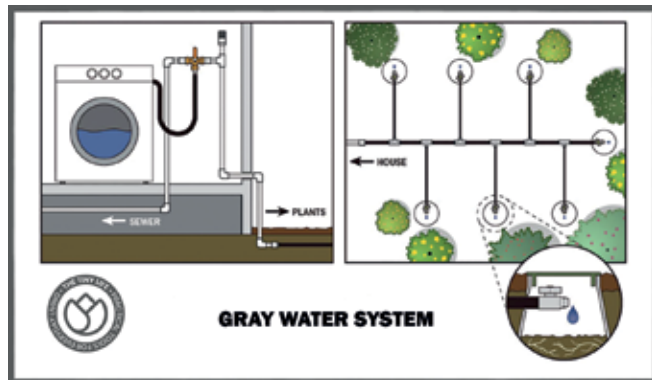
Well, if I were tall and lean, had blue eyes, and were very tan, I might consider going gray. But I am not. Actually, I am shrinking and chunky, not remotely tan, and have brown eyes that are usually bloodshot. But, relevant to a garden column, I *am* considering going gray.

Using gray water is *not* new, and it is not “yuk.” Water from your bath, shower, spa, kitchen sink, or washing machine is all considered gray water. Take note that none of the aforementioned sources have floating “chunks.” So drop the “yuk,” which is called “black water.”

What is so great about gray water? For starts, it’s free, and, besides, most systems do not use electricity. It reduces the sewage load and refills groundwater. It reduces your water bill. As global drought persists, gray water can maintain water-dependent landscapes.

This column is not a how-to about setting up a gray-water system, but rather simple information about gray water.

I first heard about gray water back in time, in April 1977, to be exact. The idea made sense to me, so by the following week I had water from the washing machine hooked up to a regular old garden hose, which watered the lawn, a young plum tree, and a clump of Louisiana iris. I was stunned by the lush green growth. For the last 35 years I had planned on setting up



Example of a home gray-water system (thetinylife.com/greywater-systems).

a gray-water system here in Applegate. It’s still on my bucket list.

I recently read an online article about a ruling from the Minnesota Court of Appeals concerning use of gray water by members of a deeply conservative Amish community in Minnesota. The court ruled, in this long-running religious freedom case, that the Amish don’t need to install septic systems to dispose of their “gray water” (news.yahoo.com/court-sides-amish-families-case-182133875.html).

That article piqued my curiosity. How did gray water suddenly become a legal case linked with religious freedom? By religious belief, the Amish do not use electricity, which is required for a septic system. Perhaps today, without being Amish, living “off the grid” is as close as we

can get to understanding why the Amish wish to use gray water.

Actually, using gray water is already a common practice and is even encouraged in many states. California has legislated household use of gray water for irrigation since 1992, and Santa Clara County, California, offers residents up to \$400 to install a

gray-water system.

According to Greywater Action (greywateraction.org), gray water reuse was legalized in Oregon in 2012. All gray-water systems require a permit from Oregon Department of Environmental Quality “to ensure that gray water is not spilling into waterways or neighboring yards.”

On its website, the Ecology Center in Berkeley, California, lists common household products to use and not to use with a gray-water system. It says you should “seek out cleaning products that are biodegradable or biocompatible and free of (1) salts, and sodium compounds; (2) boron, borate, and borax; and (3) chlorine bleach. Avoid other synthetic compounds that degrade soil quality, like coloring agents, synthetic fragrance, and artificial preservatives.” For more information,

go to [ecologycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Greywater-Cleaning-Fact-Sheet.pdf](http://ecologycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Greywater-Cleaning-Fact-Sheet.pdf).

The negative side of gray water is that it could contain pathogens. This means that you should not use gray water on crops in your vegetable garden that have direct soil contact—all root crops, and any melons, squashes, beans, and strawberries if the edible product touches the soil. Tomatoes are okay only if grown on a trellis far from the ground. Edible crops on trees are safe to eat when watered with gray water.

Think about water consumption on golf courses and sports fields. Why isn’t gray water used there? Even the US Golf Association promotes using recycled water, stating that “Nationwide, approximately [only] 13 percent of golf courses use recycled water for irrigation.”

We humans are learning that water is actually a finite resource. Whether this is due to weather conditions, wastefulness, or mere shortsightedness, parts of the planet are mighty thirsty. Starting right here at home we can conserve, preserve, restore, and save. Hooray for going gray!

“We never know the worth of water till the well is dry.” —Thomas Fuller

Dirty fingernails and all,  
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