DO’s And DON’Ts When Reusing Grey Water

Have you ever thought about recycling water?

You know what I’m talking about – we’re all used to recycling aluminum cans and bottles so the next best thing to recycle might be water, right?

I am writing about recycling water because the stories about the droughts hitting California[1] are abundant lately, and who knows which state is next? Besides, it’s always a good idea to know how to re-use the water that you have because you absolutely can’t live without it.

Why you should recycle or re-use water in the first place?

Because water is a fundamental and extremely valuable natural resource, essential for preserving life and our civilization here on Earth. Also Fresh water is a finite resource. We have salt water in abundance but only a miniscule amount of the water on the planet is actually potable.

Only about 2% of the planet’s water supply is fresh water and that should worry you quite a bit. I know that theoretically speaking, we could build huge desalinization plants and use ocean water for irrigation, drinking, fracking and whatever else we need water for, but that day is still far away in the future while the problems in the present are becoming more pressing for American families and businesses.

Before considering recycling water, you should know that one of the most effective strategies for preserving our Earth’s fresh water supply is to reduce your demand for fresh water in the first place. You can achieve that through several methods; for example, start collecting rain water[2] and using highly efficient fixtures and appliances[3] in your home.

What Is Actually Grey Water?

No matter how efficient you try to be, you're still going to use a certain amount of water, and not all of it will be for drinking. The main cause of wasted fresh water is called "grey water".

Grey water is basically what comes out of the drains after you're taking a bath or washing your clothes. Grey water is much different from black water, which is that nasty stuff flushed down the toilet.

Unlike black water, which requires serious treatment and processing in order to be sanitized, grey water can be re-used relatively safely.

For example, you can recycle most grey water[4] and use it for watering your garden or your plants.

However, the problem is that your current plumbing system doesn't differentiate between grey and black water. Instead, it combines them both into what's called sewage water, which is unusable unless it's filtrated and purified via a special water treatment facility.

Now, what can you do about that? Well, nothing much except for manually capturing your excess grey water for using it later.

Not all grey water is created equal. For example, what comes from your dishwasher or your kitchen sink may be heavily contaminated with organic matter and chemicals and can be host for lots of pathogens, while the bathroom sink water is relatively harmless, only containing soap residue and small amounts of organic matter.

Keep in mind that re-using grey water is not a difficult task; all that's required is a bit of attention to details.

You must remember the potential hazards of chemicals,

pathogens and bacteria from grey water without exaggerating their health risks. Also, take a minute and think about what system for recycling the grey water you'll be using, as some of them may require a permit if you wish to install them on your property. More about state regulations regarding recycling grey water are to be found here[5].

The Do's and Don'ts of Grey Water Recycling

Let's take a look at some ideas for efficiently re-using the grey water in your residence or place of business.

Starting with the "don'ts", try to avoid complicated grey water recycling systems that involve pumps, expensive water filters and instructions that require you to be an engineer.

Remember that there are no official reports of illness or deaths caused by responsibly re-using grey water. Still, try to use a grey water recycling system based on water flow (as opposed to a pooling one), thus minimizing the chances of bacteria proliferating inside.

Also, if there's somebody in your house suffering from an infectious disease, avoid re-using the grey water until that person gets healthy again. The reason is obvious; avoiding viruses and bacteria inside your recycled stash of grey water is critical to the health of everybody else. Common sense, really but we felt we needed to state it.

Always take care when using grey water and never allow it to mix with animal feed or drinking water, in order to prevent accidental contamination. Basically, you should avoid using grey water in the proximity of food or water sources for your livestock.

Another thing to remember when re-using grey water is "garbage in, garbage out"; that means that you should use natural,

biodegradable soaps, shampoo, detergents and other products for high quality grey water.

Regardless of your recycling system, you should never store grey water for extended periods of time; as a general rule, try not to exceed 24 hours and re-use it as quickly as possible (thus reducing the buildup of bacteria, pathogens and the like).

One of the simplest and safest methods of re-using grey water is to catch warm-up water. That's the water that goes down the drain while you're waiting for the warmer water to reach your shower or faucet. This warm-up water could be significant in quantity, especially if your heater is "lazy" or far away from your bathroom. The warm-up water is extremely clean and presents almost no health hazards, hence you can use it safely to water your plants, for example.

As for capturing it, you can simply use a bucket or a big bowl placed under the faucet, then move it away when the water gets hot enough to suit your needs.

If your local health codes allow it, you can re-use grey water from your bathroom sinks by re-engineering your sinks drains to be used as a grey water collection system. In this way, you'll no longer need to manually store grey water in buckets.

*This article has been written by **Chris Black** for Survivopedia.*

Resources

[1] https://www.survivopedia.com/california-draught-food-shortage/
[2] https://www.survivopedia.com/rain-water-tank/
[3] https://www.survivopedia.com/how-to-fix-annoying-home-problems/
[4] https://www.survivopedia.com/svp-mostwaterhome/
[5] http://www.greywater-systems.com/regs.htm/