

Using Gray Water – It Can Help, But.....

Anytime, drought conditions threaten landscape and garden plants, the use of gray water as an alternative irrigation source is raised. Gray water, of course, is slightly used water that can be reused for irrigation. It includes water from kitchen sinks, dishwashers, bathtubs and showers – not toilets.

The use of gray water is not quite as simple as one might first think. Unfortunately, there are health considerations and in some communities, local codes may not allow gray water use. In fact, recently, the gray water bill (Senate Bill 463) was signed into law which will be of interest to those interested in water conservation and landscape irrigation.

The use of gray water is really a matter of personal choice and can be very simple or more extravagant such as storing gray water in separate septic tanks with filtration and a pump system. The storage of gray water is when things get more complicated from a logistics as well as a legal standpoint. Caution should be exercised as gray water can contain high levels of bacteria. The newly passed gray water law specifies that gray water shall be contained within the residence's boundary, shall not be used on vegetable crops and shall only be applied by hand watering.

So is gray water safe for plants and does it cause problems in the soil? Gray water can slightly modify soil organism populations but usually causes no additional pest problems according to University of Georgia experts. The biggest changes that tend to occur are due to additional water that may be present. Sometimes we overdo things in attempt to help our thirsty plants. Over watering and extended periods of soil saturation with gray water can cause severe root problems for plants.

If you are using gray water, make trees and shrubs your highest priority because of their value to the landscape. Apply to soil and not on foliage, twigs or stems. Gray water should not be used on root crops or leaf crops consumed by people or livestock. Any use of gray water should be controlled to prevent standing puddles and surface run-off. Of course, I would recommend testing soil periodically as always, to make sure fertility levels are not being affected. There could be salt and/or boron toxicity problems, but this is more likely to be the result of long term use of gray water. Most use gray water as a stop gap water source until Mother Nature brings us more than pop up showers.

So, if you're wondering about using gray water, my advice is to go ahead. Keep it simple and use it everyday instead of storing it. Bacteria can be much more of a problem when we store gray water. Use gray water for watering ornamental shrubs and trees and not in the vegetable garden. As a matter of fact, just collecting fresh water from faucets and showers while you're waiting on hot water can save quite a bit of water without worrying about the concerns of using gray water.

Georgia Grazing School Registration

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service's annual Georgia Grazing School will be held on August 20-21 at the Bulloch County Center for Agriculture (Bulloch County Extension) in Statesboro. This two-day workshop will focus on management-intensive grazing and participants will learn how forage production, forage quality, and grazing behavior can be optimized in managed grazing. Training will take

place in both classroom and field settings. This year, a special emphasis is being placed on the management issues relevant to grass-fed or grain-on-grass beef operations and our management-intensive grazing dairies. Multiple classroom lectures addressing plant and grazing management will be combined with local farm visits to pasture-based beef and dairy operations. Numerous hands-on activities and demonstrations of valuable management practices will be incorporated into the outdoor activities. Cost of the two day program is \$150 and includes lunches, breaks, a grazing school handbook, a forage and weed ID handbook, and a copy of Southern Forages 4th Edition textbook. (Participants are responsible for lodging.) Registration is limited to 35 participants; accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, visit <http://www.caes.uga.edu/commodities/fieldcrops/forages/GAGrazingSchool.html> or www.georgiaforages.com.