

# The Black and White of Gray Water



## WHAT IS GRAY WATER?

### GRAY WATER IS HOUSEHOLD WATER, WHICH INCLUDES:

- ▶ Rinse water remaining after washing dishes by hand in a sink.
- ▶ Water from a bathroom sink or swimming pool
- ▶ Water from a washing machine that does not receive diapers
- ▶ Water from a bathtub or shower

## WHAT ISN'T GRAY WATER?

- ▶ Gray water should not include water from washing of diapers, or water from a toilet bowl or bedpan. Such water must be regarded as sewage and must be disposed of to a sewer or locally approved individual sewage disposal system (For example, a septic tank and leach field system).
- ▶ Gray water is not wastewater from kitchen sinks or dishwashers. Gray water should be free from oils, food scraps, high concentrations of soap, and bleach.

## PRECAUTIONS IN USING GRAY WATER:

- ▶ Do not put gray water into a spa or swimming pool
- ▶ Gray water should not be used to wash off driveways, sidewalks, or other hard surfaces if runoff cannot be contained on the property.
- ▶ Keep children from playing in irrigation gray water.
- ▶ Avoid any use that would allow contact between gray water and food or drinking water.
- ▶ Do not over apply gray water to soil; when soil is saturated with water, gray water could pool on the surface and create a health hazard.
- ▶ Be thoughtful and careful in all uses of gray water. Illness will negate any benefits derived from the use of gray water.

## WHERE TO USE GRAY WATER:

### OUTDOORS: GRAY WATER IS SUITABLE FOR IRRIGATING LAWNS, TREES, ORNAMENTALS, AND FOOD CROPS.

### SEVERAL GUIDELINES APPLY TO THE USE OF GRAY WATER.

- ▶ Apply gray water directly to the soil, not through a sprinkler or any method that would allow contact with the above ground part of the plants.
- ▶ Do not irrigate a garden in a manner that allows gray water to contact or reach anything you will eat without peeling or cooking.
- ▶ Root crops, such as carrots, radishes, and onions, which are eaten uncooked, should not be irrigated with gray water.
- ▶ Do not apply gray water near low-growing food crops, such as lettuces and strawberries.
- ▶ Disperse gray water over a large area, and rotate with fresh water to avoid buildup of sodium salts.
- ▶ Apply gray water only to flat areas where runoff is not likely. Do not allow gray water to pond on the surface of the ground. A cloth bag attached to the end of the hose will help distribute water and also act as an additional filter.
- ▶ Gray water containing certain detergents and soaps may damage some plants and damage the ability of the soil to absorb water. Plants that thrive only in acidic soil should not be watered with gray water, which is alkaline.
- ▶ Don't pour water directly at the base of tree trunks or shrubs. This may cause crown rot; the feeder roots that take up water are located farther out from the trunk.
- ▶ Be sure to apply enough water so that the plants get a good drink. Deeper-rooted plants get little benefit if only enough water is applied to just wet the ground surface.

## LOCAL REQUIREMENTS AND RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF GRAY WATER:

Improper alteration of wastewater drainage connections and other features of home plumbing might create a cross-connection or interference with water pressure, allowing contaminated water into the clean drinking water supply. Alternating the home plumbing system must never be done without the approval of the local building or plumbing authority.

Consult the county health department and local building and/or plumbing authority to determine what restrictions and requirements apply in reusing gray water.

Holding tanks, gray water treatment devices, sewage systems using pumps and other features of gray water systems may require approval of local agencies. Use of toilet wastes for irrigation or utilization is prohibited by state law, which is enforced by local agencies. Disposal of human wastes by any method other than into an appropriate sewage system is unlawful and extremely hazardous to public health.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GRAY WATER VISIT [WWW.AMWC.US](http://WWW.AMWC.US) AND CLICK ON GRAY WATER.