

Reusing household water could save your landscape

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With the recent declaration of a Level 4 Drought by EPD, homeowners across north Georgia are trying to determine how to maintain their lawns and landscapes. While exemptions are in place for certain business enterprises, the average homeowner will not be able irrigate anytime in the near future.

While you cannot irrigate with municipal water, you do have another option – watering with reuse water or gray water. In times of water shortage, slightly used water can provide an alternative landscape irrigation source. Separating slightly used (gray) water from sewage (black water) makes good conservation sense.

Daily, homeowners misuse or waste an average of 33 percent of valuable drinking water. Most of this water misuse is for diluting toilet, sink and laundry wastes and from slightly used sink, shower and laundry water.

Gray water is water that can be used twice. It includes the discharge from kitchen sinks and dishwashers (not garbage disposals); bathtubs, showers and lavatories (not toilets); and the household laundry (not diaper water). Using gray water can almost greatly increase your home water-use efficiency and provide a water source for landscape irrigation.

While Georgia EPD does not recommend that you develop a gray water collection system, residents are allowed to collect water from sinks, showers, and/or bathtubs for landscape irrigation. This low-tech practice can help you minimize the water wasted down the drain, and instead use it in the landscape.

If watering your landscape plants with gray water, be careful not to use water which contains harsh cleaners, thinners, drain openers, and/or cleaning materials that contain boron. Also, do not use artificially softened water. Softeners replace calcium and magnesium with sodium. Long-term irrigation with high-sodium water can cause soil problems.

If utilizing gray water for landscape watering, follow these tips:

- Make trees and shrubs a high-priority because of their individual value.
- Apply gray water to soil. Never spray on foliage, twigs or stems. Never soak bark or root-collar area.
- Do not use gray water to irrigate edible plants (fruits, vegetables, herbs, etc.)
- Do not use on indoor trees or other plants with limited rooting space, in small containers, or plants normally under saturated conditions.
- Always apply gray water at the soil surface. Apply over mulch, if present.
- Be careful of applications that apply gray water directly to leaf surfaces of ground covers and turfgrasses.
- Control gray-water application and infiltration to prevent standing puddles and surface runoff.