



Grey water is great water!

We all know that South Africa is a water scarce country and that we should be saving water in any way we can. But did you know that there is a wonderful source of water right under our noses?



Water from the shower or bath makes for excellent greywater.

No matter how conscientious we are – everyone has to use water, and not just for drinking purposes! We also need water for washing, cooking, and doing the laundry. The upside is that much of this water can be reused. It is estimated that as much as 60% of the wastewater produced by an average household can be reused as greywater.

The water left over in a basin, and from showering, bathing, and laundry is known as greywater. (Greywater does not include water that has come into contact with poo, such as toilet water and from washing diapers – this is known as blackwater, and is not safe for reuse). The problem is that our modern sewerage systems do not distinguish between black water (which needs to be treated) and greywater, which can be reused.

While greywater or slightly used water might seem dirty – it might contain traces of food, dirt, grease or cleaning products – it can still be used for various things. Aside from the obvious benefits of saving water (and money on your family's water bill), reusing your greywater keeps it out of the sewer system (thereby reducing the chance that it will pollute receiving rivers and streams). As South Africa has so little water to go around, we have to all do our part to reign in our water use and reuse water any way we can to ensure that there remains enough for everyone – including the environment.

Greywater can be reused in three main ways:

- By collecting small quantities of greywater in a bucket from the bath or shower and reusing it to irrigate lawns and gardens.
- By asking a plumber to install a system that redirects greywater from the shower, bath and laundry for use in the garden or lawn
- Or installing a system to treat greywater. This treated water can be used above ground for lawns and gardens, to flush toilets and in washing machines. This kind of system needs to be installed by a plumber and requires approval from the local municipality.

You don't have to be an engineer or a plumber to reuse greywater. The easiest way to reuse greywater is to reuse it on the garden. Greywater can help most plants thrive. The water from the bath, shower or laundry will probably contain soaps and detergents. These contain salts, and nutrients (phosphorous and nitrogen), which help plants grow. Reusing greywater directly in the garden means we are adding these nutrients to the soil.

Collecting greywater doesn't require a specialised system. For example, you could easily use your old pet water to give your plants a drink before refreshing the animal's water bowl. The



same goes for the old water in your fish tank. Fishbowl water also has the added benefit of nutrients from fish waste. By placing a container in the shower you can collect water while you wash! If you have to wait for your bath or shower water to heat up before you use it, you can catch this water and use it to flush the toilet.

In the same way used water can easily be collected from washing machines as they have a drain pipe exiting the back of the washer. Water can be easily be removed from the drain to the sewer and placed into collection buckets.

There are some common sense rules when using greywater. If someone in your house has an infectious disease, it's best not to reuse the greywater until that person gets healthy again (you don't want to be spreading viruses and bacteria around). Never mix greywater with food or drinking water, and don't store greywater for long periods of time (it will start to smell).

Greywater is best used on laws and ornamental plants, but can also be used for vegetable gardens (just as long as it doesn't touch the edible part of the plant).

Greywater will not solve our water crisis. But it can certainly help to ensure each drops reaches just a little further.



The nutrients from greywater can help plants grow.

Sources
www.survivopedia.com/reusing-grey-water/
www.mygreenlife.com.au
www.howstuffworks.com

Greywater Dos and Don'ts

- Don't drink or play with greywater (don't let pets drink it either)
- Do wash your hands after watering with greywater
- Don't use greywater on vegetable gardens if the crop is to be eaten raw or uncooked
- Don't use greywater that has faecal contamination (i.e. from washing nappies etc.)
- Don't store greywater for longer than 24 hours



When freshening up your dog's bowl use the old water on nearby plants.