

Re-using Your Water
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With seemingly no end to the bountiful winter/spring rains this year, we're all heaving a sigh of relief that the three-year drought is over! So much rain and snow should mean less threat of wildfire, and less concern about conserving water, right? Well, not entirely. Let's count the reasons why we need to always think about water as the precious and *finite* resource that it is:

#1- 60% of Oregon is desert, and water all over the west, along with water rights, is fast becoming as precious as gold.

#2- Here in the Rogue Valley we get little to no precipitation during the dry summer months when we need rain the most.

#3- Climate change projections for this area predict more precipitation during winter months, but hotter and drier summers with less rain than the usual scant amount we may or may not receive.

#4- As the human population increases, ground water supplies everywhere are being used up faster than the rain can recharge into the ground.

#5- Every summer we watch the slow drain of Emigrant Lake and the feeder lakes above it, hoping that they won't run out too soon. Hyatt was at a record low last year, so we know that our over-all water supply can be somewhat of a crapshoot.

#6- Even though we're tapped into Medford's water supply now, we shouldn't rely upon it unless we really need to, which we may, if climate change predictions are accurate.

#7- While nearly **70%** of the world is covered by water, only **2.5%** of it is fresh, and just 1 percent of our freshwater is easily accessible, with much of it trapped in glaciers and snowfields.

These issues highlight the cold hard fact that NOW is a great time to consider installing rainwater catchment and/or a greywater system! It's really not rocket science to capture and store rain from your roof to irrigate, instead of relying solely on expensively treated drinking water for your plants, shade trees and gardens. It's also pretty simple to recycle greywater from baths, showers, sinks and washing machines to water parts of your landscape. Permits and materials all have an up-front cost, but over time, recycling water saves you money. More importantly, it saves and utilizes water that was just being wasted before!

Greywater, or Laundry to Landscape systems (types 1, 2 and 3) save costs at the water treatment plant, reduce thermal discharges into Bear Creek, and save money by reducing your use of potable water for the non-potable use of sub-surface irrigation. A greywater permit from DEQ costs about \$90. Average homes use 90-110 gallons of water daily, so why not re-use it for watering gardens, trees, and food crops? Kitchen sinks are Ok, but the hardest to filter, while bathroom sinks, showers, and laundry water are relatively clean. DEQ and the City of Ashland Conservation staff have detailed resources to help you get started at these websites:

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/reuse/graywater.htm>

<https://greywateraction.org/content/about-greywater-reuse/>

Rainwater catchment from rooftops is also allowed in Oregon, for non-potable uses like irrigation, hose bibs, toilets, urinals, clothes washing, heating and air conditioning. All it takes is re-directing your gutters to spill into a large, filtered storage tank or two, and then have a way to pump it or use gravity to irrigate areas of your yard. Basically you need to calculate how much water your roof generates annually, to decide the right sized covered storage tank(s) to purchase. Then you dig a flat spot, layer a solid bed of sand and gravel for the tank, get a first flush

diverter, filter and re-direct your gutters into the tank, protect it from direct sun, and watch it fill with free water all winter long. Plastic, metal, or fiberglass tanks range from 1,000-40,000 gallons, which can definitely make a dent in summer water bills. (Links below)

We on the Conservation Commission are hosting a free tour of local greywater & catchment systems on June 3rd, from 10-12, leaving from North Mt. Park, and we will host additional workshops on installation of these water saving systems in the future. Check out these websites to help you get started:

<http://www.ashland.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=11701>

<http://www.arcsa.org/>