



Greywater Q&A

SepticSmart Program

What is greywater?

Greywater is generally defined as all wastewater that is produced from household activities, with the exception of wastewater from the toilet.

What is black water?

Black water is wastewater that comes from the toilet.

What is in greywater?

Although greywater may be lower in contaminants than black water, it is more than just soapy water. Greywater can contain viruses, bacteria, and chemicals. Reusing untreated greywater may increase the possibility of viruses and bacteria in groundwater and surface water, thus causing a public health hazard.

When can greywater be reused?

In Boulder County, the use of greywater outside of the home must follow the same guidelines as a septic system (i.e. onsite wastewater system, or OWS). It requires an OWS permit, a septic tank, a leach field, and suitable soil to neutralize and treat viruses and bacteria. Permits cannot be issued in municipalities or sewer districts without variances to the regulations. The use of untreated greywater outside the home is not permitted in Colorado unless it can meet surface discharge limits for bacteria and other pollutants.

Greywater systems must meet the minimum design and construction standards included in the Boulder County Public Health OWS regulations, as well as design standards that are specifically for greywater treatment and management. There must be no contact with greywater before it has been treated.

Can I use greywater for irrigation?

Greywater can be legally applied to the ground surface, but only if the water is collected and analyzed by a laboratory for bacteria and other pollutants, and it meets all limits. The use of greywater for irrigation may be subject to water rights limitations, as regulated through the Colorado Division of Water Resources, Office of the State Engineer (www.water.state.co.us, 303-866-3587). All greywater surface discharge systems must be tested at least once per week.

Typical Pollutants from Common Greywater Sources

Clothes washer	bacteria, bleach, foam, soaps, high pH, nitrates, oil, grease, phosphates, salinity, oxygen demand, suspended solids, sodium
Dishwasher	bacteria, foam, soaps, high pH, oil, grease, food particles, odor, salinity, oxygen demand, suspended solids
Bathtub & shower	Bacteria, hair, oil, grease, odor, oxygen demand, soaps, suspended solids
Sink, including kitchen	Bacteria, food particles, oil, grease, odor, organic matter, oxygen demand, soaps, suspended solids

For more information about greywater, please contact the Boulder County Public Health Environmental Health Division at 303-441-1564, or visit www.BoulderCountyWater.org/services/recycling.htm.

Check. Permit. Update. Approve.