

# Graywater legislation good for growth



## Permaculture in Practice

by Nate  
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When he flopped open the front page of his Sunday issue of *The New York Times* two days before the start of his first legislative session as New Mexico's governor, Bill Richardson probably cringed. There, in color, was the silvery minnow and an article about how New Mexico has mostly ignored its water problem. "Jeez!" he must have said, "How's a guy, even a sweet talker like me, gonna attract businesses here when my entire Palm Pilot outside of the 505 area code just found out we're out of water?"

Faced both with dwindling water reserves and a need to grow our

economy, Richardson would be wise to apply the permaculture principle that considers "problems" as solutions. Rather than seeing the water problem as a drag on our economy, we should be inspired by water harvesting and recycling solutions that create jobs.

One such solution, which would ease regulations on residential graywater re-use, is pending in the Legislature. As of this writing, the bill has not been named and numbered, but this fall it passed unanimously through an important interim committee. It also has the support of a number of local environmental advocacy groups and business-oriented groups as well as the city of Santa Fe.

It's doubtful that the hardworking state task force that drafted the bill, or its lead sponsor, State Representative Mimi Stewart, D-Albuquerque, would say that the legislation is about economic development. It's simply about making the use of graywater (that's domestic-use water that doesn't go

through the toilet, kitchen sink, or dishwasher) in the landscape safer and more widely understood.

Looking at the legislation, which happens to closely resemble the laws in Arizona and Texas, we find (fortunately) that no permit is required for graywater use in the landscape as long as 10 basic conditions are met:

- 1.) No more than 250 gallons of graywater may be used during a 24-hour period;
- 2.) An overflow system must be installed to divert excess graywater into a sewage system;
- 3.) The graywater storage tank must be covered to prevent use by mosquitos and other fauna;
- 4.) The system must be sited outside of any floodway;
- 5.) The system must be sited five feet above the water table;
- 6.) Graywater pipes must be clearly marked;
- 7.) Graywater may only be used onsite for landscaping, gardening and composting.
- 8.) Graywater may not pond for more than 24 hours.

9.) Graywater may never be sprayed in the air.

10.) Use of graywater also must comply with local ordinances, if any, that are more restrictive.

Many homeowners, if properly educated, will have no problem following these simple guidelines. But there will certainly be many who would like to use graywater effectively but would prefer not to install the system themselves. This is where plumbing, irrigation and landscaping jobs get directly created. In addition, the construction industry as a whole is boosted when buildings need less water to provide curb appeal.

If you are concerned about a sustainable future for New Mexico, call your state elected officials today and encourage them to support this reform.

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