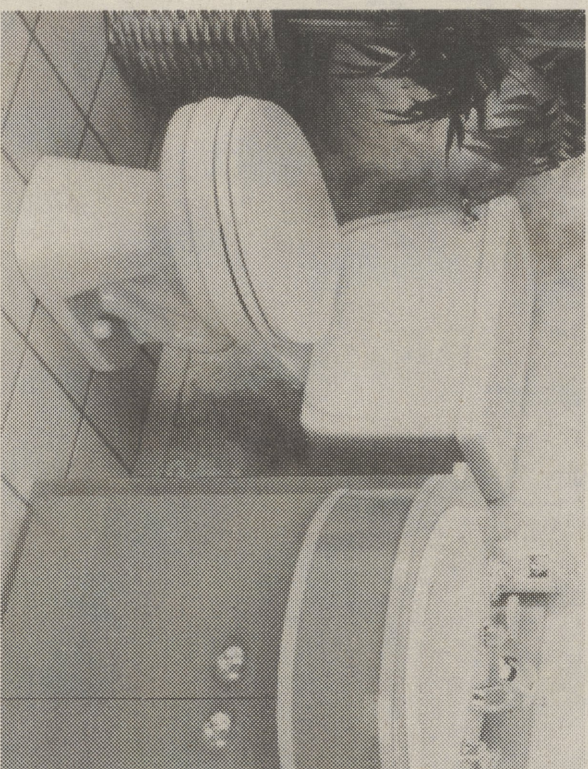


Bath fixtures save water

A new generation of residential plumbing products mandated by federal energy policy provisions offer homeowners a ready way to save water and cut their long-term household operating costs. That's because bath fixtures produced for residential use after the first day of 1994 must comply with lower water consumption rates that are specified in the National Energy Policy Act.

New household toilets, for example, use less than half the water on every flush than older toilets use — 1.6 gallons per flush (gpf) instead of the old standard of 3.5 gpf. By replacing older toilets with the new water-conserving models, a typical homeowner can substantially cut the volume of water used throughout the house.

Combined with a conscious effort to avoid flushes that aren't necessary, changing over to the new products can help conserve our natural resources and produce meaningful savings in the face of rising utility costs and regional water shortages.



Toilets manufactured since 1994 must use only 1.6 gallons of water per flush versus 3.5 to 5 gallons for older fixtures.

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Bell Furniture is one of the nation's first retailers to carry the season's most-talked-about new line of home furnishings, based on the work of America's favorite artist: Norman Rockwell. The collection is now on display at Bell Furniture. The Saturday Evening Post/Norman Rockwell Home Refurnishing Collection by Stanley Furniture Co., Inc. is an extensive line of wood and upholstered furniture inspired by the lifestyles of the people depicted in Rockwell's cover illustrations.



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The many advantages of raised garden beds

Looking for a better way to grow vegetables this year? Consider installing a raised bed. The advantages far outweigh the initial investment of time and money, says a Penn State specialist.

Most gardeners find that raised beds are easier to maintain and promote better plant growth. "Walking in a garden causes soil compaction, which can cause problems with drainage and oxygen availability to the roots," says Dr. Michael Orzolek, professor of horticulture in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "It's also more difficult to weed when soil is compacted. With a raised bed, you can plant, weed and harvest without ever walking on the soil."

Raised beds can be filled with high-quality soil, and it's easy to add compost or other organic matter. Tong-rooted plants, such as carrots, do especially well in this environment because there are no stones to hinder their development. Orzolek says.

Plants in raised beds get more sun and air circulation, and they can make better use of water. "You often can plant earlier and harvest later, because raised beds warm up early in the spring and stay warm later in the fall," Orzolek says.

Raised beds also make ideal places to grow plants that can be invasive in a regular garden — such as mint and horseradish. But ease and convenience is the benefit many gardeners appreciate most. If you get a bad back and sore knees every year from gardening, a raised bed may put an end to those aches and pains.

Raised vegetable beds are excellent for gardeners who have trouble with their backs. Older people who don't have the flexibility they used to, people in wheelchairs or with other disabilities, and those who don't want to spend the summer on their knees in the garden, says Orzolek.

To install a raised bed, first choose a sunny location and decide on the size and shape you want. Some gardeners till the soil before building raised beds, to provide additional room for root development.

Construct the frame with a nontoxic building material, such as stone, cinderblocks, bricks, concrete blocks or fiberglass. Avoid pressure-treated lumber and creosote-treated railroad ties. Some garden catalogs and centers now offer raised bed frames that snap together and can easily be taken apart.

Make sure the frame is between 12 and 16 inches high and is sturdy enough to hold together when filled with soil. If you use boards, they must be secured at the corners with metal braces or screws, or nailed to a reinforcing block of wood inside the corner — if you nail into the ends of boards, they will split.

Fill the frame with good-quality lightweight soil mix, and add a generous amount of compost. "Avoid using soil straight from the garden," says Orzolek. "It usually is too heavy and doesn't allow for proper drainage."

A well-constructed raised bed should last for years, and soil fertility can be maintained by adding organic matter. "Raised beds have been used for centuries," Orzolek says. "And with good reason — they're better for many plants and they're easier on gardeners."

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