

Using graywater for good

By Samidha Mishra

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A common response to the environmental crises of today is simply “There is nothing I can do.” A valid belief, considering the magnitude of this issue, but not exactly a constructive one. Luckily, there are students like Arthrav Naidu, a junior at San Mateo High School, who take matters into their own hands by focusing on local ways to go green and make a difference.

Naidu founded Policy for Good, a foundation that has the primary goal of showcasing the “importance and benefits of using graywater instead of tap water when growing your own food and plants locally,” as Naidu explains. Graywater is the output from washing machines, dishwashers and sinks that is safe to use when watering plants. It is an excellent alternative to fresh water, which is fast becoming a limitation in creating local gardens because of how scarce it is and how difficult it is to transport.

Naidu discovered the importance of graywater through his mother — he saw her pouring the water she had used to clean the dishes into the plants.

“I wanted to know if it was safe for plants to use that kind of water,” Naidu explains, “so I designed an experiment to test it out.”

Using bean plants in his trials, Naidu discovered that the graywater that contains biodegradable detergent and no bleach was just as good as regular tap water when it comes to helping plants grow.

“After my experiment, I was concerned that graywater wasn’t being talked about enough,” Naidu maintains, “so I have since been on a mission to provide this information to libraries and communities throughout the Peninsula.”



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Policy for Good accomplishes Naidu's mission by distributing grow kits called "Plant in a Box" to various communities. Grow kits are sets that contain all the components and instructions needed to plant a garden in small spaces. Though such equipment costs upwards of \$15 on the market, Naidu used sustainable materials like coconut husks for soil to reduce the price all the way to a mere \$3. His grow kit called "Plant in a Box" kills two birds with one stone because it both spreads awareness on the value of graywater, and encourages people that might not have had sufficient resources or space otherwise to take up gardening.

Naidu faced several obstacles on his way to establishing this project, but the most prominent of them was trying to find a way to reduce the price of the grow kits by such a drastic amount. He faced the issue head-on, though, by personally contacting numerous manufacturers and persuading them into making effective deals with him by explaining his purpose and mission.

By persevering in such a way, Naidu achieved great success in his organization, running his program in six libraries, from San Mateo to South San Francisco, and teaching as many as 400 kids about the importance of growing their own. He also raised \$1,100 through GoFundMe to finance the development of his Plant in a Box.

Despite these impressive successes, Naidu's mission is far from complete: He aims to reach Policy for Good out to six more libraries and hundreds of more young minds within the following year. He is also in the process of building a graywater filter, an invention that would signal a massive step toward a much more green and sustainable future.

"I am hoping, with these efforts, city, county and state governments take note, and look into enacting policies for graywater reuse," Naidu said. "I also hope that the next generation will be less afraid to reuse graywater in their own garden."

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