

# How to Build a Laundry-to-Landscape System

## Step 1: Assess Your Site

Where is the easiest area to irrigate? Usually this area is closest to the washing machine and not uphill. Does this area need irrigation? If not, are there more plants that need irrigation that you'd like to grow in this area? If not, is there another area needing irrigation where you could send the graywater?

Once you have identified the best place to irrigate, you'll need to figure out how to get the graywater to this landscape. Start in the laundry room. Imagine a pipe leaving the house near the machine. Is the machine on an exterior wall? If so, you'd drill through the wall to exit the building. Is the machine in an interior room? If so, is there a crawlspace or basement where you could drop down through the floor and run the pipe outside? Look for obstacles, such as doorways, sidewalks, patios, driveways, etc., on the way out. A narrow sidewalk can be cut with a concrete saw, or dug under, but a large driveway between the washer and the landscape could potentially be an insurmountable barrier.

The points below are general guidelines to help you select appropriate locations to irrigate using a laundry-to-landscape system. It is your responsibility to determine what is safe for your particular situation. If your washing machine is not operating properly or draining well, it is probably not a good idea to install a graywater system from it. When in doubt, contact a pump specialist or graywater professional.

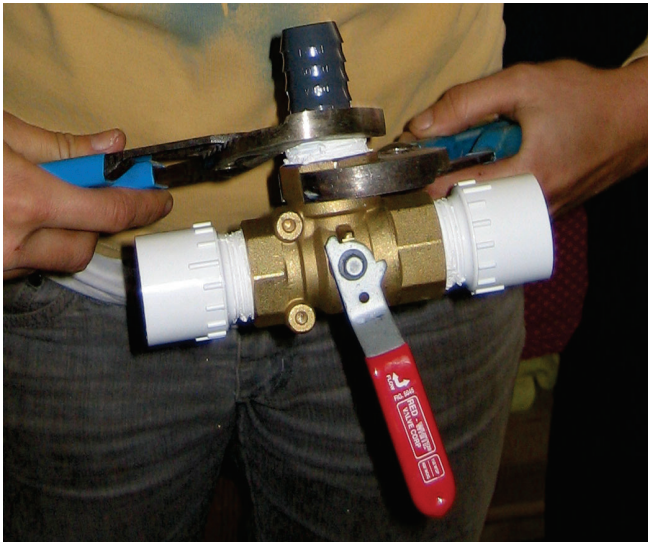
- Sloped yards: Don't distribute water uphill. The washing machine has an internal pump, but it is not designed to pump up a hill.

If your yard slopes downhill from the location of the washing machine, the graywater distribution piping can extend as far as needed. On steep slopes, the tubing should be installed in a serpentine pattern (S-shape, like a switch-back trail) to slow down the water. Otherwise it will rush to the bottom of the hill, and you won't be able to irrigate the upper plants.

- Flat yards: For most machines, it is generally safe to distribute graywater up to 50 feet across a flat yard. Greater distances could result in damage to the washing machine pump, since friction losses increase with distance and put more pressure on the machine's pump.



*Drilling a 1½-inch hole for pipe. Note: A pilot hole was drilled first. Photo: Laura Allen.*



*Tightening fittings onto the 3-way valve with channel locks. Photo: Laura Allen.*

## Important Considerations for Exterior Walls

Exterior walls within 5 feet of the property line must be fire-rated. If your pipe exits a fire-rated wall, then you must comply with applicable building and plumbing codes to ensure that the integrity of the wall is not compromised. Consult a professional or contact DBI with questions.



*Gluing pipes on either side of a 3-way valve.  
Photo: Laura Allen.*

Draw a simple sketch of your system, from the washing machine to the plants. Collect the tools and parts needed.

Now you're ready to start building the system.

### Step 2: Make an Exit for the Pipe

Identify where the pipe will exit the building. Be careful not to cut into electrical wires, pipes, or studs. Drill a ¼-inch pilot hole with a thin, long drill bit that can pass through the entire wall. Ensure you are not hitting anything in the wall. You may need to try more than one location if you hit a stud or other obstacle.

If the drill path is clear of electrical wires, pipes, and studs, and the hole exits in a good location on the outside of the building, use the pilot hole as a guide and drill with a 1½-inch hole saw to make a hole large enough for the 1-inch PVC pipe (#14). The type of bit you'll need depends on what the wall is made of: use stucco bits on stucco walls and wood bits on wooden walls. To make a clean hole on both sides, drill from both the outside in and from the inside out. After you finish installing your system, you will need to seal the hole with a waterproof adhesive, such as Sikaflex®, to prevent moisture from entering the wall.

If your washing machine is in an interior room and the pipe will exit the house through a crawlspace or basement, go under the house and look for potential obstacles. Then follow the same instructions for drilling as described above, although you only need to drill from the top down, since it won't matter what the hole looks like in the crawlspace.

### Step 3: Prepare the 3-Way Valve

Note that numbers in parentheses refer to the parts list above.

1. Wrap Teflon® tape clockwise around the threaded fittings (two male adapters [#2] and one barbed male adapter [#3] fitting).
2. Insert the male adapters into the threads on both sides of the 3-way valve and turn gently, by hand, making sure not to cross-thread the plastic threads. Do the same with the barbed male adapter, inserting it into the middle of the valve. Turn

clockwise with your hands as tightly as you can.

3. With two pairs of channel locks, continue to tighten the fittings until very tight.
4. Remove the laundry drain hose from the sewer connection (utility sink or standpipe) and place a hose clamp (#4) over the end of the hose. Connect the hose to the barbed fitting on the tee and use the hose clamp to tighten and secure the hose in place, making a watertight seal. (If the hose is rigid plastic, heating the plastic can soften it and make it easier to slip over the barbed fitting. You can use a blow dryer or cup of hot water to heat the hose.) After the system is complete, you will check this seal by running the machine.

Note: These directions are written for a 1-inch laundry drain hose, which is the most common size. Some of the newer, ultra-efficient hoses are  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch. If your hose is non-standard, you'll need to use a barbed fitting that fits your hose and then adapt it to a 1-inch male pipe thread fitting to attach to the 3-way valve. For example, if your hose is  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch, you'll use a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch barbed male adapter threaded into a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by 1-inch threaded bushing.

#### Step 4: Plumbing to and from the 3-Way Valve

1. Hold the 3-way valve (#1) up and look for a good place on the wall to mount it so that the handle can turn freely and is accessible. The valve **MUST** be above the flood rim of the washing machine: don't put it lower than the machine (see photo at right).
2. Choose the most direct route for plumbing one side of the valve to the sewer, and orient the other side of the valve towards the hole in the side of the house, or the floor, depending on your situation.

Note: If your system exits through the floor, the auto vent will be inside the home, since you must put the auto vent at the high point in the system, usually directly above the hole in the floor. See Step 7 for instructions on installing the auto vent.



*The 3-way valve is slightly above the sewer connection (behind the machine), while the auto vent is about a foot higher than the flood rim of the machine.*

*Photo: Laura Allen.*





*1-inch Blu-lock HDPE tubing laid out in trenches. All tubing was buried after system was finished.  
Photo: Laura Allen.*

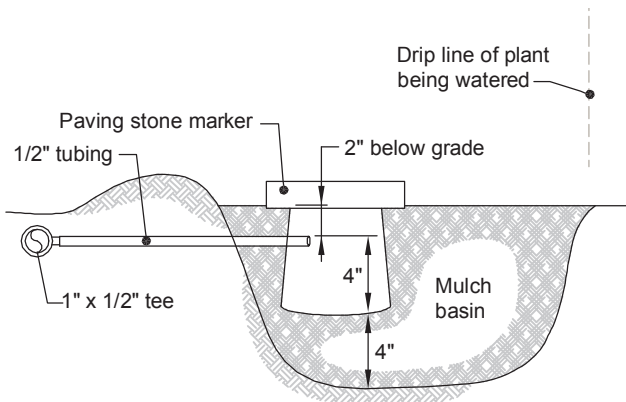


*Mulch basin around a dwarf peach tree being filled with wood chips. Photo: David Glover.*

3. Measure all the pipe pieces you need, cut the 1-inch PVC (#14), and connect the piping and fittings without any glue. Once glued, the pipe will slide farther into the fitting to a lip on the interior, so take this into account when measuring. Leave a few inches of pipe sticking out of the hole on the outside of the building.
4. Mark all of the fittings and pipe so that when you glue them together, they are in the position you would like them to be.
5. One at a time, glue the pipe sections and fittings together with PVC glue, being sure to protect underlying surfaces from dripping glue. "Gorilla PVC" is a less toxic PVC glue.
6. Go outside and glue the branch of the tee onto the pipe sticking out of the wall. While the glue is wet, adjust the tee with a level so the long axis of the tee is pointing straight up and down. Remember, if the pipe goes through the crawl space or basement, the auto vent must be located inside the laundry room. Make sure the auto vent (see next step below) is accessible so that it can be changed if it wears out and needs replacement. If water ever leaks out of the auto vent, it must be replaced.
7. The auto vent should be at least 6 inches above the flood rim of the washing machine and, when possible, located outside in case it fails and leaks. To assemble the auto vent, follow these steps. Glue the bushing (#5) into the slip portion of the 1½-inch female adapter (#6). Wrap Teflon® tape on the threads of the auto vent (#7), and then thread the auto vent into the threaded side of the female adapter (#6) and tighten. Glue one end of a small 2-inch piece of 1-inch PVC pipe (#14) into the 1-inch side of the bushing (#5). Then glue the other end into the top of the tee (#8).
8. Measure, cut, and glue a piece of PVC pipe to extend from the bottom part of the tee to the ground. If there is a deck or other obstacle between your washer and the irrigation area, you will have to route the pipe around the obstacles. Try to maintain a downward slope whenever possible. Put a 90-degree bend at the bottom of the vertical pipe section and direct the pipe towards the landscape. Place the 1-inch barbed x slip adapter (#9) on the end of the pipe. This is where the 1-inch HDPE tubing (#16) will connect.

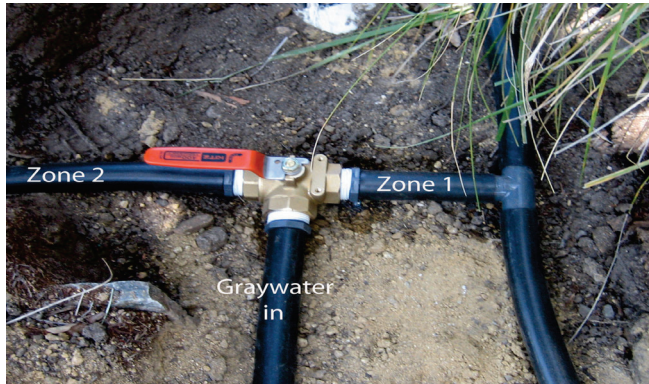
**Step 5: Preparing the Landscape and Running the Irrigation Tubing**

1. Dig mulch basins around the drip line of all the plants you wish to irrigate. Mulch basins are created by removing soil and filling the empty space with mulch. If you can't dig a basin around the entire plant, dig a semi-circle, or trench on one side of the plant. The mulch basins should be between 6 and 12 inches deep, depending on the mature size of the plant. Smaller plants need less water and smaller basins.
2. Dig a trench, about 4 inches deep, from the PVC pipe to the first mulch basin. Continue the trench to all the basins, taking the most direct route possible while avoiding sharp turns. If possible, maintain a slight downward slope or at least a level gradient. If the system has dips and rises, it will be harder to get even distribution of water when you tune the system.
3. Make or buy a “valve box” or “mulch shield” for each graywater outlet (Figure 4). Mulch shields can be made out of 1- or 3-gallon flower pots. Put the pot upside down (so the bottom is on top) and make a “lid” by cutting the bottom of the pot so that it can be flipped up like a lid on a can (leaving a section intact to hold the “lid” in place). Drill a hole 2 inches below the “lid” for the graywater tube to enter. Then cut off the rest of the pot 4 inches below the hole you made for the graywater tube. If a more sturdy shield is needed, a valve box can be purchased and altered in a similar way.
4. Place each box or shield in a mulch basin. Make sure there is 2 to 4 inches of mulch underneath the mulch shield. The graywater outlet must enter the shield at least 2 inches below the ground surface.
5. Roll the HDPE tubing (#16) out in the trench to all the mulch basins, staking the tubing so it stays in place. At each irrigation point, cut the tubing and insert a 1-inch by 1/2-inch barbed tee (#10) into the tubing. Attach a short section of 1/2-inch poly tubing (#15) as needed to reach each basin, and insert it into the mulch shield.
6. Take a photograph of the yard before you bury the tubing! Put this picture in your operation and maintenance (O&M) manual (templates in Appendix B) for future reference. After taking the photograph, bury most of the tubing so it is securely in



*Figure 4. Mulch shield placement.*





*This 3-way valve creates two zones in the landscape. Water can be redirected from one zone to another zone by turning the handle. Photo: Laura Allen.*



*Adjusting flow by rotating the tees. Ball valves can be added to the ends of small tubes, if necessary. Photo: David Glover.*

place. Leave the areas with 1 x ½-inch tees (#10) exposed, as you might need to adjust them while tuning the system.

- Multiple irrigation zones: If your site produces a lot of water and your plants are spread out in different sections of your yard, you might want to set up two irrigation zones. Having separate zones allows you to spread the water out to more places but requires someone to manually switch the system between zones. To install a second zone, add another 3-way valve at the desired location in the system, threading a male adapter by barb into each side of the tee. Run separate 1-inch tubes to different areas of the landscape. The valve directs water to each area as desired.

### Step 6: “Tuning” the System

After you have laid out all the tubing, you need to test it to ensure that water flows out evenly from the multiple outlets. To do this, temporarily insert a barbed 1-inch female hose thread adapter (#12) into the tubing, where it would normally connect to the PVC pipe. Then connect a garden hose to this fitting. Turn the hose on, about medium-high flow, and then monitor the outlets. If you notice that more water is exiting the first outlet and none is reaching the end, you can adjust the angle of the tees, turning them up or down depending on whether there is too much or too little water coming out. If the flow is still uneven after you've done that, add a ½-inch green back ball valve (#11) to the first outlet and shut off the flow slightly. Do not use other types of ball valves, as they clog quickly. Is water coming out evenly among outlets now? If not, you may need to add another valve and repeat the process until water flows evenly from all the outlets. Avoid adding extra ball valves, because they are a point of potential clogging. NEVER put a valve or plug into the end of the main 1-inch line. If you restrict the end of the main line and your outlets clog, the washing machine pump could get damaged. If you have more than one 1-inch line, as when you use a 1-inch by 1-inch by 1-inch tee, and send two 1-inch lines in different directions, then it is okay to restrict one end, since there is a second end fully open.

### Step 7: Testing the System

After you have tuned the part of the system outside your home, disconnect the hose and connect the tubing to the PVC pipe. Now you'll test the system with the washing machine. Run a load of laundry with the 3-way valve turned to the graywater system. As

the water flows out, check the glued joints, making sure they are all watertight. Check the connection from the washer hose to the 3-way valve; this is a common place to have leaks. You might need to tighten the hose clamp or add a second clamp. Next, go outside and observe how water flows through the system. You might need to readjust the ball valve(s), since the water pressure from the machine will be different from that of the hose. After testing is complete, paint exposed PVC pipe with regular house paint, usually the same color as the building (to protect it from UV damage), and waterproof any holes.

### Step 8: Labeling the System

Label the 3-way valve and aboveground graywater pipes (Appendix A). The 3-way valve must be labeled with clear instructions for changing the direction of graywater flow (to sewer or landscape). Aboveground pipes must be labeled with the words “CAUTION: NONPOTABLE WATER, DO NOT DRINK” at intervals of 5 feet or less.

## Key Points

- Put the 3-way valve above the flood rim of the machine, in an accessible location inside the home.
- Put the auto vent at the high point of the system, at least 6 inches above the flood rim of the washing machine in an accessible location in case it needs to be replaced. If possible, locate the auto vent outside.
- Use 1-inch pipe and tubing, with 1-inch x ½-inch tees to send graywater to specific plants; do not use larger or smaller pipe for the main graywater line.
- Always leave one end of the 1-inch main line tubing fully open, with no valves or caps.
- Don't overwork your washing machine. Remember not to use the pump to send water uphill or too far across a flat yard (50 feet across a flat yard is typically a safe distance).



*Exposed PVC pipe is painted to protect it from UV degradation. The hole is sealed with an adhesive sealant to prevent moisture from entering.*