

Q&A: Dishwashers Get New Rules

BY MARY BETH BRECKENRIDGE
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Q: I washed a load in my dishwasher using a new box of Cascade powdered detergent, and my dishes didn't come out as clean as usual. The biggest problem was with my aluminum pressure cooker, which came out spotted and discolored. I called Procter & Gamble and was told all manufacturers are being required to make phosphate-free detergents now. Is there anything I can do to get better results?

— E.L., Akron, Ohio

A: On July 1, 16 states, including Ohio, enacted a ban on high-phosphate dishwasher detergents. In response, manufacturers have reformulated dishwasher detergents sold across the country and in Canada, since they can't reasonably sell different types in different areas, said Dennis Griesing, vice president of government affairs for the American Cleaning Institute.

Phosphates break down grease and remove stains, so you might see a difference in cleaning performance from detergents that contain little or no phosphates. While I don't have good comparison information yet on the newly reformulated products, I can tell you that Consumer Reports

recommends three phosphate-free detergents, Biokleen With Natural Oxygen Bleach Powder, Method Smart Dish and Ecover Tablets. Procter & Gamble also recommends its Cascade Complete All-in-One Action Packs, which it considers its best dishwasher product.

While the problem with your pressure cooker may have been related to the detergent, it's also possible it was caused by a reaction with something else in the dishwasher, said Ian Tholking of Procter & Gamble.

Aluminum is a highly reactive metal, he explained, meaning it can react with water, leaving the surface dark and chalky. When another reactive item is in the same wash load, the items can react with each other, exaggerating the problem — even more so if the items are touching. That's why people who've washed aluminum items successfully in the dishwasher can suddenly have a problem, he said.

Tholking recommends checking the manufacturers' instructions on all metal items to make sure they're dishwasher safe. Also, make sure to follow the instructions on loading and operating the dishwasher, including the use of a rinse aid, he said.

HOMEGARDEN Smart Design Creates Energy-Efficient Home

BY JEAN PATTESON
© 2010, The Orlando Sentinel

ORLANDO, Fla. — The Lake County, Fla., home Paul Fallman shares with his wife and two daughters has 4,000 square feet of living space. Yet his electric bills have averaged just \$180 a month so far this year, despite record-low winter temperatures and close-to-record summer highs.

His natural-gas bill for two tankless water heaters and a fireplace averages \$25 a month. "My focus with this house was energy efficiency," says Fallman, owner of Fallman Design & Construction in Clermont, Fla. "It's so easy to do. It's a great marketing angle. And it's the right thing to do."

The key to the energy efficiency of the lakefront home, which is certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition, is its south-facing orientation, said Fallman, who has made green-building his specialty.

Before starting construction, he commissioned a solar-path study to track the angle of the sun in winter and summer. He used the information to design a home that would be flooded with sunlight during the cooler months, but shaded by porches,

balconies and extra-wide roof overhangs when temperatures soar.

"It's the single thing a builder can do to make a home more efficient without much more expense," he says.

The three-garage home on the site of the historic Clermont Yacht Club, which was torn down in the early 1950s, also is angled to maximize views across two-mile-wide Lake Minnehaha. Facing the lake on the first floor are the kitchen, dining room, living room and master suite, which either open onto screened porches or are shaded by wide roof overhangs and high-performance windows — tinted, Low-E4 and argon-filled.

Upstairs, covered balconies or roof overhangs shade the bedrooms and walls of the three bedrooms and loft area. An apartment above a second garage has similar features.

To receive certification from the green building coalition, a home must be inspected by a green certifier and an energy rater, Fallman says. (Approved certifiers and raters are listed on the coalition's website, florida-greenbuilding.org) The green certifier makes as many as 10 checks of the site and home before and during construction,

checking for items such as site drainage and properly sealed plumbing pipes, doors and windows. The energy rater conducts a duct-blast test, blower-door test and thermal-envelope test to determine how airtight the home is.

The Fallman home has a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) score of 62 out of 100. The lower the score, the more energy efficient the home. For a home to be Energy Star-rated, it must score 85 or lower. (For more details on Energy Star ratings, visit energystar.gov)

At present, about 70 percent of the payback for building green is improved energy-efficiency, Fallman says. Spending \$3,000 to \$5,000 on equipment upgrades and an additional \$2,000 to \$3,000 on green construction will pay for itself in 5 to 10 years, he figures.

Certainly, better air-handling equipment cuts down on dust and indoor humidity; better insulation creates a quieter home; drip irrigation in the yard saves water.

The Fallman home, which is on the market for \$1.1 million, also features these energy-efficient elements:

— Fifty-year shingle roof with Icynene spray-foam insulation,

which: keeps cool air in, heat and dampness out; protects against dust and insects; and improves structural strength.

— Concrete-block walls with rigid insulation on the first floor, and 2x6 frame with R-19 batt insulation on the second floor.

— Semi-air conditioned, 200-square-foot attic, which keeps ducts about 30 degrees cooler in the summer, so the air-conditioner doesn't have to work as hard.

— Low-E4 windows with tinted, high-performance glass and wood frames, which don't conduct heat.

— Non-conductive fiberglass doors with insulated glass.

— Dual-compressor 20 SEER (seasonal energy efficiency ratio) air-conditioner and timeable bathroom fans for humidity control.

— Two tankless gas water heaters.

— Gas fireplace with electric ignition.

— Windows at the top of the stairs to vent rising hot air and ceiling fans in many rooms.

— Energy-Star appliances, which use less energy.

— Compact fluorescent lighting.

Park Goes Even Greener With \$64 Million Overhaul

BY MARY MACVEAN
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LOS ANGELES — It's magical to walk among the century-old oak trees and the thousands of camellias that take shelter under them in Descanso Gardens, a chance, even when the flowers are not in bloom, to gaze wide-eyed at the glories of the planet.

But however pleasing, it turns out to be one lousy pairing for the trees and the flowers.

Descanso has decided it's time for a breakup, based on irreconcilable differences.

Many of the cherished camellias will be relocated as part of a new 237-page long-range plan that makes Descanso a model for sustainability and guides decisions for years to come about what to plant and where to plant it. Camellias, which need water year round, will be moved away from dry-dependent oaks, but that's just a start.

The plan calls for Descanso, in La Canada Flintridge, Calif., to use zero potable water for irrigation, to stop trucking 300 tons of waste annually to a landfill and to become a self-sufficient generator of energy, in part by installing solar panels over parking spaces.

Many public gardens in the last decade have moved to correct problems related to the wrong plants installed in the wrong places, but Descanso's "fundamental shift in its role in the community" — to become a role model for water conservation and fire protection — puts it in a category of its own, said Daniel J. Stark, executive director of the American Public Gardens Association.

Water is at the center of the change for Descanso, which sits in a natural bowl at the base of the San Rafael Hills.

"Descanso Gardens was, and is, continuously being shaped by the action of water flowing across the site, the availability of water from Hall Beckley Canyon, and the lack of rain water for much of the year," notes the plan, which offers guiding principles for the land, from chaparral to flower garden. At \$64.1 million, the changes will require substantial fundraising to realize conservation, new buildings, programs and more.

Descanso, which is county-owned but has been run since 1993 by the nonprofit Descanso Gardens Guild, has an irresistible "opportunity to come to grips with major issues of the day" and to promote "a change in human behavior away from mindless consumption at all costs," said David Brown, the gardens' executive director.

Changes come with another imperative: maintaining the restful beauty and cultural history of the 150-acre La Canada Flintridge site, which greets 275,000 visitors a year.

The Portico Group, a Seattle firm, and other consultants worked with Descanso staff, trustees and volunteers for years to come up with ideas that respect the history of the land as an agricultural estate and public garden and that move it toward becoming a "water-wise, fire-smart oasis of beauty."

Some of the changes are underway, but in large measure, plans still need to be put into action. "How do we get from big ideas to shovels in the ground?" as Brian Sullivan, Descanso's director of horticulture and gardening operations, put it.



KIRK MCKOY/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT

It's magical to walk among the century-old oak trees and the thousands of camellias that take shelter under them in Descanso Gardens in La Canada Flintridge, California.

Two acres of lawn near the entrance have been replaced with eastern redbud, California sycamore, native shrubs and other selections — a move Brown said will shave 600,000 gallons of water from the more than 3 million gallons used for irrigation each year.

This summer, the 5-acre rose garden will try a Cyber-Rain system for its 3,000 shrubs. Using satellite feeds and software that take into account soil, temperature and humidity, the staff will have "really, really fine control, as opposed to us thinking, 'OK, it's Tuesday — water for 10 minutes,'" Sullivan said.

Nature's Table, a food garden, replaced the Sundial lawn near the entrance. That doesn't mean visitors will look in vain for grass for picnics or concerts.

"We will always have this," Brown said, sitting on a bench overlooking the main lawn, where two little boys ran with all their might. "A well-taken care of lawn is a thing of beauty, deeply evocative and important."

Mount Auburn Cemetery, the burial ground for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and public garden in Cambridge, Mass., knows what it's like to upset its fans. In the mid-1990s, it decided to remove dozens of invasive Norway maples from a dell where it wanted native species.

"We did definitely hear about it

from the public," especially bird watchers, said Bree Harvey, the garden's spokeswoman. But over time, once people understood that the stopping point for birds' spring migration had not been lost, public opinion came around, she said.

"People really are invested in these spaces. They get emotionally attached for many reasons," Harvey said.

Jenny Stewart has been going to Descanso for about 30 years; her 13-year-old son took his first steps there. When she learned of the proposed changes, she wrote a long letter to garden officials saying how upset she was and asking that they "leave everything alone." But director Brown and horticulturist Sullivan met with her, showed her oak trees that were rotting and talked about the future. She came around.

"You have to see that doing nothing is going to be bad for the garden," she said.

E. Manchester Boddy, a newspaper publisher who owned Rancho Descanso, planted on his estate 60,000 to 80,000 camellias that he bought from two friends — Japanese nurserymen who were being sent to the Manzanar internment camp after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

At the time, when Boddy planted 17 acres in the protective shade of the oaks to supply the

cut flower market, few people thought much about water conservation. And of course the camellias are inarguably gorgeous in winter bloom.

"This is what people love," Brown said on a walk through the oak and camellia forest. "But keeping the camellias happy is not very good for these guys," he said, rapping on a nearby oak.

The camellias have become, Descanso said in one report, "an overgrown remnant of nearly 50 years of inattention." Those spindly plants fighting the oaks for sunlight "is not how we want people to fall in love with camellias," Brown said.

The oaks — some more than 200 years old — are threatened by a root fungus that thrives on the water going to the camellias, Sullivan said.

So to people who asked, how could you break them up? Descanso replied, how could we not? And Brown and Sullivan said they consistently make converts when they have a chance to explain what's ahead.

"Can I walk to the nursery and buy a new camellia? Yes I can," Sullivan said. "Can I run down to Armstrong and purchase that oak tree? Probably not. This is a naturally occurring oak forest."

Over time, many camellias will be relocated to a 10-acre spread near the Boddy House, just a few

minutes' walk from where they have been, leaving the kind of California coast live oak woodland that once covered much of the region. Other camellias may be moved only slightly, ideally at least 10 feet from any oak.

How the camellias survive the move and various styles of pruning will be carefully monitored. An expert in oak root diseases will see whether the oaks grow stronger without their companions.

Public gardens all over the country have recognized that "they have a responsibility to communicate with their public important messages about things like water conservation and responsible landscaping," said the gardens association's Stark.

Those messages might be about removing invasive species, conserving water or eating a plant-

based diet and avoiding obesity.

A garden in the New York borough of Queens showcases sustainable practices in an urban setting.

At the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh, the cafeteria uses natural light and biodegradable paper products.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont focuses on native California plants.

Brown can be philosophical about the mission before him, citing one historian's view that "every garden at some level is a search for a return to Eden," a place with deep emotional undertones, a story "written in the language of plants and landscapes."

Of the story he's helping to write at Descanso, he said: "I hope people will look back and think we got it right."



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