

Don't flush good fertilizer down the drain

By MELISSA BLANKENSHIP

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When she built her home, Julie Brent was interested in doing so with the environment in mind.

"I wanted to do things that impacted the earth's natural cycle as much as possible," said Brent, who owns and operates Your Well Being in Campbellsburg. "I was concerned that a septic tank could possibly leak and pollute streams and waterways. That's when I started researching a composting toilet."

Brent did her homework and consulted with the local environmentalist at the county health department to make sure she could install a composting unit instead of a septic system. She then selected a company and furnished her home with two low-flush composting toilets and a central containment unit.

Her experience with the company and the product led her to become a dealer.

"The company was so supportive in getting me up and running, and they answered all my questions," Brent said. "They gave me all the support I needed, and I thought it would be a good company to work with."

Brent installed her composting toilets three years ago, but just recently began to offer them to her friends and neighbors as an environmentally-conscious alternative.

Composting toilets look and act very much like normal toilets, but with one major difference. The end product is not flushed into a sewer line or septic system, but instead is contained and treated and transformed into a natural fertilizer.

"The big picture is that environmentally, our streams and waterways are very polluted with waste material that's not handled well," Brent said. "In this way, waste can be used productively rather than put in those streams and waterways."

The systems are approved by the National Sanitation Foundation and are produced in a number of sizes to accommodate various capacities. County environmentalists, including Amy Tingle in Henry County, are willing to consider composting toilets in lieu of a traditional septic system. However, Brent thinks most people aren't ready to install the systems in their homes. But they might consider them for their cabins, boats, recreational vehicles, barns, workshops and even poolside. Brent said that many state parks are installing both the dry-flush and low-flush models in more remote areas to provide basic facilities for park-goers so that human waste is not deposited in the parks.

"It makes perfect sense to

install a composting toilet when you have limited access to running water or electricity," Brent said. "And it's much better than an outhouse or going to a dump station and using all those chemicals."

Composting toilets don't use any chemicals, but instead incorporate fill material like newspaper, sawdust or a peat mixture with bacteria and heat to compost waste and toilet paper to create a clean, dry, odorless fertilizer that can be used on trees, shrubs and flowers.

"Technically, there's no problem using it on gardens because the compost is free of bacteria and toxins," Brent said. "But most people have an aversion to doing that. As a fertilizer, the compost is excellent, and trees and shrubs really do wonderfully with it."

Composting toilets can be either free-standing and self-contained, or use containment systems that hold waste from multiple units. The cost for residential systems is similar to that of a septic system, but smaller models start at around \$1,000. Brent said the systems are "not complicated or smelly," but that they do require regular maintenance. "It's like taking the

garbage out once or twice a week, but this doesn't go to the landfill," Brent said. "The maintenance essentially ensures that you don't kill the living bacteria in the unit. It's a living, breathing thing, just like the earth, just like the body. In our stomachs, the food we eat is broken down by bacteria. This system works the same way.

"It's a very natural and very normal process," Brent added. "And it's a great way to keep from polluting our streams while unburdening our infrastructure and finding a productive use for something we usually just flush away."

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Sun-Mar's poolside composting toilet promises to "keep the pool out of your house and keep mistakes out of the pool." Other models of composting toilets are appropriate for cabins, campers, barns and boats.

