

## Be kind to your drains this holiday season

Prepping for the holiday season always tends to be a bit more challenging with our elaborate menus and long to-do lists as we prepare to host, cook, and eat. This means that the kitchen tends to be a busy place. No matter what your holiday menu might entail, it's important to be kind to your drain and avoid holiday mishaps that could have you plunging or dealing with a sewer backup – activities that no one wants to partake in.

As you prepare your family feast and during the extensive clean-up that follows, no amount of grease should ever go down your drain. That includes the cooking oil that may be used to deep-fry the turkey and any food remnants that contain fat, oil, or grease (known as FOG), including gravy, buttery potatoes, or baked goods like leftover pumpkin pie. FOG can cause sewer damage and backups, which would not be a holiday gift we want to receive.



The water that goes down the kitchen drain doesn't disappear. It travels through the sewer system to the wastewater treatment plant to be processed and cleaned. It is then reused for purposes such as groundwater recharge and landscape irrigation or released back into nature to join the water cycle. Since the sewers get water from thousands of kitchens, the smallest amount of grease and oil can build up and clog a pipe as the fats and grease cling to the inside of your city's sewer pipes, causing them not to function as designed. Those greasy contaminants can also make wastewater treatment and processing far more challenging than it has to be.

To avoid clogs backups and ensure the sewer lines in your neighborhood keep things moving, here are a few ways to keep your plumbing working throughout the holidays and save your city time and money while maintaining FOG at bay:

- Pour cooking oils and grease into a small container with absorbent material, such as a paper towel or coffee grounds, and dispose of it in the trash or recycle it at a grease disposal or environmental recycling site that may be available in your city.
- Scrape food from dishes into the trash (not the garbage disposal) and wipe down greasy plates, pots, and pans with a paper towel before washing.
- Filter and reuse large amounts of deep-frying oil.
- Refrigerate and reuse fat for cooking.
- Prevent food from entering your sewer by covering your kitchen sink drain with a strainer.

- Limit your use of garbage disposals because they only shred solids and do not prevent grease from building up again.
- And remember that hot water from your tap or dishwasher might appear to melt the grease and push it further down the drain, but it will solidify again once it cools. This will cause a build-up in the central sewer system and can affect neighboring sewer lines.

In addition to time spent in the kitchen, we know that with a house full of company, the bathroom can also see an increase in traffic flow, so it's important to ensure your guests are sewer savvy by letting them know that what you flush matters. It's important to remind them that the toilet is not a trash can, and things such as wipes (no matter what the label claims), paper towels, facial tissue, diapers, feminine hygiene products, cotton swabs, cotton balls, band-aids, and dental floss should **never** be flushed. They do not break down in the same fashion as toilet paper, will cause clogs, and get tangled with everything else fighting to get through the pipes, causing back-ups. So, ensure everyone understands that human waste and toilet paper are the only acceptable items to be flushed.

By not putting any unneeded strain on all your drains and pipes, you can avoid an unplanned visit from your plumber, not just during the holidays but year-round. Clogged pipes and sewer backups are never a good surprise; they can significantly damage your home, neighborhood, and the environment. Limiting contaminants and unwanted items from entering our pipes ensures a clean and properly functioning sewer system, which benefits us all.

*To find out more about available cooking oil recycling programs, please visit your municipality's website for locations.*

*For over 50 years, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has helped protect our member cities' ability to provide their communities with assured, safe, and sustainable water supplies. For more information, visit [www.amwua.org](http://www.amwua.org).*