

Flush with success: Toilet installation easy do-it-yourself project

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

It may look intimidating, but installing a new toilet is one of the easiest do-it-yourself jobs for weekend warriors. In fact, the hardest part may be choosing from the astounding array of toilets on the market.

Whether replacing an outdated commode to conserve water or just updating the look of the loo, homeowners will not want for options. Ranging in price from \$50 to \$5,000, there is literally a toilet for every budget — and every need.

So what exactly does \$5,000 get you? A throne fit for a king. High-end options include heated seats, electronically controlled hands-free flushing and ion-barrier finishes that manufacturers claim needs no cleaning — ever. The do-it-yourselfer with a more modest budget will probably stay in the \$100 range, however.

“You’re going to get a decent toilet for \$100, and that’s including the tank

and the bowl,” said Lou Manfredini, host of the radio call-in show “Mr. Fix-It” on Chicago’s WGN-AM and Ace Hardware’s “Helpful Hardware Man.”

Expensive toilets may sound luxurious, but all the bells and whistles aren’t necessary. The most important considerations when choosing a toilet are the bowl construction and the flushing action.

“In the cheaper toilets, the china is not that great and the flushing action is maybe not as forceful as it needs to be,” Manfredini said.

No-frills doesn’t necessarily mean no style, though.

“Style has certainly entered into the marketplace,” Manfredini said. “It’s not just about function anymore. Form is involved now, too.”

The latest aesthetically minded commodes feature black porcelain, brushed stainless steel, hand-painted accents, rectangular bowls and wall-mounting.

“If you are trying to update a bathroom,

installing new fixtures that includes a new toilet, is a great way to brighten up the look,” Manfredini said.

Commodes designed for comfort offer another incentive to swap out that old toilet. Toilets with elongated bowls, for example, tend to be more comfortable, as the seat is generally wider. Taller toilets that sit 18 inches off the floor, as opposed to the traditional 15 inches, aim to replicate the comfort of a chair. Those living in older homes may benefit the most from new toilets.

“Certainly, water conservation is one of the big reasons to update your toilets if they are older than 20 to 25 years old,” Manfredini said. Low-flush toilets, mandated by the Environmental Protection Agency to save water, may have gotten a bad rap in the beginning, but the latest low-flows are rather luxurious.

“Low-flush toilets have been around for awhile. A lot of people to this day think these toilets don’t

work, that they’re not as effective as the older ones, but that’s really not the case anymore,” Manfredini said.

Power-assisted toilets, which use air pressure to move the water instead of gravity, provide even greater flushing action. The result mimics the flushing action of commercial commodes.

Installing a new toilet is rather simple; the entire project takes just a couple of hours. A few tips from the pros can help the job run more smoothly, though. Most importantly, homeowners should use caution when lifting the toilet.

“Installing a toilet is a great way to throw out your back,” Manfredini said. “It’s an oddly shaped fixture, and a lot of times the tank and the bowl come in two pieces. Professional plumbers set the bowl first, then assemble the tank onto the bowl.”

“Trying to lift and bend over and hold onto the toilet at the same time is a sure-fire way to herniate a disc if

you’re not careful.”

Do-it-yourselfers also should use restraint when tightening the johnny bolts that hold the toilet to the flange in the floor. The bolts should be snug and secure, but Herculean strength is not required. Moderation is key.

“You want to tighten the bolts evenly, but not too tight. You just want to get it nice and snug. You could break the china if the bolts are too tight,” Manfredini said.

Finally, after the toilet is installed, homeowners should check for leaks. Even a small leak could cause severe damage if left unchecked.

“You want to turn the water on and check for leaks before you put the lid on the toilet and install the seat,” Manfredini said. “You want to make sure you have a good seal.”



CNS Photo

It may look intimidating, but installing a new toilet is one of the easiest do-it-yourself jobs for weekend warriors. In fact, the entire project takes just a couple of hours and standard tools.

Being uprooted: What to do when it’s time to relocate large plants

BY JIM HILLBILLISH
Copley News Service

You know the feeling. That blue spruce you planted five years ago suddenly is too close to the drive. It whips your car every time.

Cut it down? What a waste. Trim it? Ugly. Move it? Good choice.

I’m a fan of recycling plants that have outgrown their living spaces. This spring, I’ve moved an ancient climbing rose, two large grapes, five pampas grasses, a number of day lilies and a 12-foot pussy willow. Everybody survived, including me, and is happy.

One of the challenges of planting is figuring out how big the plant will get. You

must find a spot that anticipates its future needs. New plants are so small. Five years later, they’re too big.

You can vastly improve your landscape scheme by moving these offenders. I like the price — free, for sweat work.

You’ll need the right tools. A heavy shovel and a pruner to cut roots are musts. A narrow shovel, about 5-inches wide and 2-feet long, is perfect for reaching deeply under the plant and popping it out.

Your best new planting location is in full sun and away from other trees and bushes. They will compete for nutrients and water with

your newcomer.

After you’ve decided the location, estimate the size of the root ball. Make a few shovel cuts around the plant. If you’re hitting heavy wood, move the shovel farther out.

Plants have different root systems. Bushes often grow roots similar to a river delta, flat streams of wood close to the surface. Trees often send down large tap roots deep into the soil.

You always will lose some roots when you replant. You need to retain enough for the plant to recover from the shock of transplanting. It then will send out new ones, and life will go on.

The mission here is to pre-

serve as many of the roots as possible. I try for more than 50 percent. Getting all of them is impossible.

Dig a circle around the plant and clear off the dirt. Trim long roots with the pruner. Then run the shovel under the main body and work it upward. Do this all around.

Finally, trim the newly exposed roots and pull out the plant. Keep your wheelbarrow handy.

As I’m digging, I take a close look at how the plant grows. Is it shallow or deep? Is there a crown close to the surface that must remain uncovered? These are keys to how you’ll replant it.

Your replanting hole should look like the old hole, in width and depth. Clear out all the rocks. Work up the soil on the bottom and chop it finely.

I plant exclusively in compost from my heap. This is the secret of my success. Compost jump-starts roots. If you don’t have any, buy a few bags at the garden store. Don’t use peat moss. It removes nitrogen from the soil as it rots.

Put in a layer of compost and position the plant. If it’s too low, adjust with more compost. Then fill in around it with more compost and tamp. (The dirt from your hole can go into your heap to

make more compost for next year.)

Don’t use fertilizer. It is too hot (strong) for a plant stressed by a move. It can burn off the new roots as they form.

Finally, I deeply water and mulch with a 2-inch layer of chipped leaves or straw. This will preserve soil moisture and control weeds. Don’t use more than that. You want the rain to penetrate.

You’ll need to treat the moved plant as you would a new one. For the next six months, it will need at least 2 inches of water a week. Never allow it to fully dry out, especially in the stressful heat of summer.

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