

# From emergency shower to backpack friend, the garden sprayer is a real versatile tool

By Keb Burns

Ice cold water. That's what came out of the shower head on that miserable winter day. I groaned because I knew that the heating element in the water tank had finally died. I didn't have time to fix it right then, but I sure needed a shower.

As I pondered the dilemma, my eyes fell on my brand new, still in-the-box, pump-up sprayer. I don't know if a cartoon light bulb appeared over my head, but a light sure went on inside of it. I realized that I could use the sprayer for a makeshift shower.

I heated water on the stove, poured it into the spray tank, pumped it up, and set it by the bathtub. After using a wet cloth to lather and scrub, I showered away the residue with the spray wand. Four gallons of water later I was clean.

Since that happy catastrophe, I've learned that the pump-up sprayer is a handy source of portable water under pressure any time running water is unavailable. It is also an outstanding tool for using water with precise efficiency. I use my sprayer for a variety of chores around my homestead, garden, and greenhouse.

Around the house I use it for general cleaning from windows to woodwork. In the garden, it allows me to direct a controlled amount of water to the base of each plant so that I don't waste a drop of my precious, collected rainwater. By switching the straight spray wand with one that I bent into a shepherd's crook, I can water my hanging baskets without taking them down. In the greenhouse, the fine mist setting on the nozzle is perfect for watering newly planted seeds and cuttings.

The gentle, nearly silent spray is ideal for bathing and tending animals. It seems to frighten them less than

tubs and garden hoses. My pet bird loves getting a shower from it.

For travel and camping, the sprayer is invaluable. It can be used for rinsing everything from soapy dishes to sandy feet. There is even such a thing as a backpack sprayer. These usually hold four gallons, but Chapin makes a stainless steel model that holds five. They also make a seven-gallon sprayer in stainless that comes on a two-wheeled push cart.

absorbed into the bloodstream simply by being in contact with the skin, so can other chemicals.

- *Do not use graywater* in the sprayer. It can contain microorganisms that will multiply explosively in the warm, moist conditions of the tank.
- Always release the pressure in the tank immediately after each use. Storing the sprayer pumped up will quickly wear out the gaskets and pressure regulator.
- Always keep spare parts on hand. Repairs are so simple that your chores needn't suffer much of an interruption if something does go wrong.
- All sprayers are somewhat pricey, so buy the best quality sprayer you can afford from a company that guarantees its products. Clean and maintain it according to the manufacturer's instructions and it will become an indispensable lifetime tool. Δ

If you decide to give the pump-up sprayer a try, keep these important tips in mind:

- *Buy a new sprayer and label it with an indelible marker as "Clean Water Only."* Never use it for anything else. Never appropriate a used sprayer for this *purpose*, and don't even think of picking one up at a garage sale. Chemical residues are impossible to remove no matter how carefully the sprayer is cleaned. If you doubt the wisdom of this advice, think about how a prescription drug patch works. If medicine can be