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Forget Toilet Paper, We Bought a Bidet

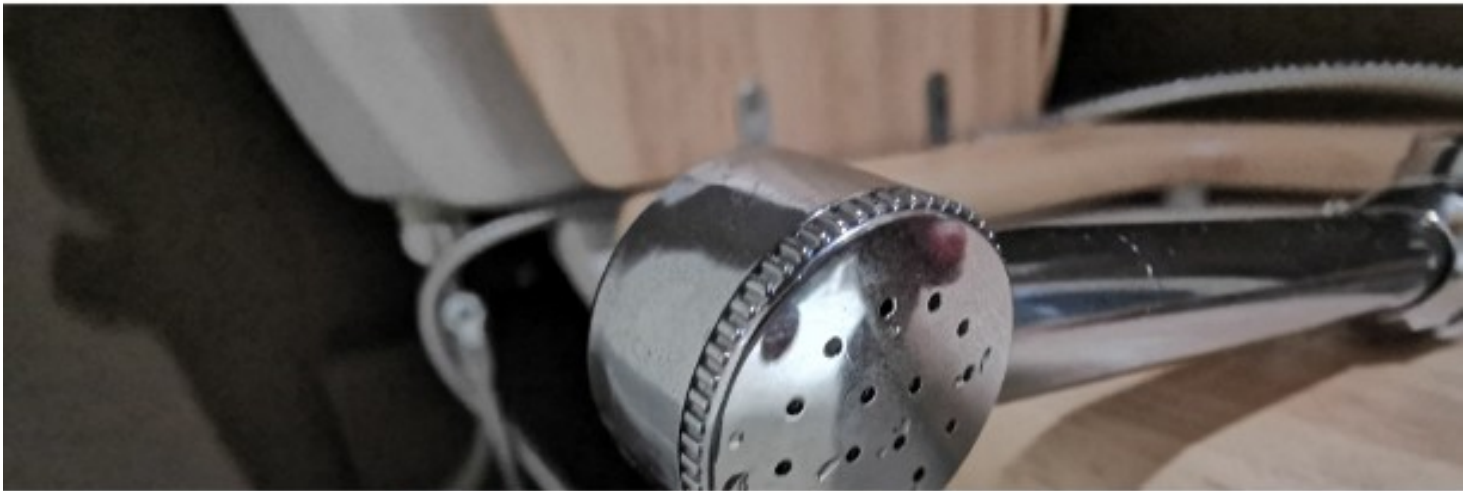
Pandemic-induced shortages inspired our family to go paperless in the bathroom, and we're not alone.



Barry Rueger

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The newest addition to the author's bathroom routine: a handheld bidet, connected to the toilet's water supply. (Photo by Susan Evans)

Three weeks into the coronavirus crisis, we were down to our last roll of toilet paper. My British-born wife Susan said, "We're not going to see paper in the stores. Let's buy a bidet." I guess I must have made a face, because her next comment was, "You are so Canadian. Afraid to try anything new!"

I grew up in the '70s in Kelowna, BC. In those days the area was dominated by fruit orchards, not big box retailers, and I honestly don't believe there was a single bidet in the entire town. Fifty years later, the sum total of my knowledge was that a bidet resembled a seatless toilet with hot and cold taps, which somehow sprayed your nether regions. As far as I knew, only women used them.

My first time, I managed to shoot water between my legs and soak the pants around my ankles.

Well, now I know better! I learned that "bidet" is actually a generic term for a variety of devices. As well as standalone porcelain fixtures, it can be applied to: the high-tech Japanese toilet seats that not only wash but also dry you; plastic squirt bottles designed for the same purpose; and handheld sprayers that attach to your toilet water supply. I also now know that a bidet is not a toilet at all, it's only used for cleaning yourself. And I've learned that after using it you'll be wet, in need of a handy towel or toilet paper.

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Eliminating toilet paper appealed to my environmental side. As *Asperagus* contributor Alia Dharssi pointed out in 2018: "Toilet paper use worldwide wiped out the equivalent of 27,000 trees a day in 2010... Household tissue that isn't recycled — including toilet paper, paper towels, and paper napkins — uses wood pulp from Canada's boreal forests as a 'key ingredient.'" Instead of spending time at the supermarket trying to pick the "greenest" toilet paper, our new bidet means we've just about stopped using it.



The author demonstrating the bidet sprayer in action. (Photo by Susan Evans)

Stand-alone ceramic bidets cost at least \$500, and we would've had to remove a wall and have a plumber add water lines and a drain. We ruled that out, and instead spent CS69 for an Aquas hand-held bidet, one of several brands available locally.

Apparently we aren't the only ones. An email from the manufacturer said they're "experiencing an overwhelming amount of orders," and a recent *LA Times* article describes how sales of Tushy-brand bidet attachments "have grown from double to triple to more like 10-times what they were in weeks before" the pandemic.

Our bidet took less than ten minutes to install, and only a few "visits" to master. It seems simple to stick the six-inch spray nozzle under you and press the valve with your thumb, but my first time I managed to shoot water between my legs and soak the pants around my ankles. Susan and I have both managed to accidentally wash the floor around the toilet with an ill-directed spray. What the bidet has done is force us to really focus when on the toilet, instead of checking email or reading a book. You need to be paying attention when your thumb hits the button.

It did seem strange, but after a week I'll admit it leaves me feeling cleaner than toilet paper.

It did seem strange to poke a chrome sprayer behind me for a wash, but after a week I'll admit it leaves me feeling cleaner than toilet paper. The cold water isn't that cold, and it does seem to be more hygienic.

What's even better is the feeling that we're no longer sending endless rolls of toilet paper into the sewer system. Even if the paper is recycled, it's an incredible waste of resources for such a simple job. For those of us who care about the environment, that's a big selling point.

And it's a bonus that every time I walk past empty TP shelves at the supermarket, I can say a quiet little "Who cares?" to myself.



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