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Filter Frustrations

Quest for better taste and softness can cause confusion

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Special to Home

Understanding the importance of chemical-free water is the first step toward a healthy lifestyle. Picking the right filtration system to soften the water and make it taste better is the next most important step.

But where do you start?

There are so many water filtration and softening systems available to the homeowner in the Las Vegas Valley that it can and does become very confusing to the layman. Reverse osmosis, ionizer, magnetic, kinetic, ultraviolet and numerous less costly types, many using a form of salt to do the cleansing, are each promoted as the ultimate filtration system.

Regardless of the type of system selected, all were designed to remove contaminants and impurities found in water.

Inexpensive filtering devices such as those offered by Brita, Culligan and Pur, which recently introduced a way to add fruit flavoring, do a pretty good job of removing contaminants from drinking water and making it taste better. These include easy-to-install faucet filters and water pitchers with a filter and can often be purchased at a local drug or department store.

Amway's eSpring system combines ultraviolet light technology with a patented multistage carbon-block filter to purify water.

Prices for these types of filtering systems can range from about \$34.95 to \$420.

However, the systems that get the highest ratings from Underwriters Laboratories and NSF International, which researches, tests and certifies various consumer products, are those using the reverse osmosis technique.

Reverse osmosis is sometimes referred to as ultrafiltration because it involves moving water through a membrane or series of membranes. The membranes have microscopic openings, measuring 1,000th of the diameter of a human hair, that allow water molecules but not larger compounds to pass through. Some systems also have an electrical charge that helps reject some chemicals at the membrane surface.

According to Danny Prince, vice president of marketing for Diamond Water Co., which uses General Electric's PureOFlow, his company is the only one in Las Vegas that specializes in reverse osmosis water filtration systems for the entire home. Prince said that his system stops 98 percent of all known contaminants found in the local water supply.

An average home, consisting of two bathrooms, a kitchen and perhaps a wet bar, can have a Diamond Water system for drinking and cooking installed for as low as \$480. To date, his company has installed whole-house systems in more than 500 homes, as well as about 150 commercial units in hotels and casinos.

Prince discusses water issues during his weekly radio show, "The Truth About Water," which airs at 10 a.m. Sundays on KDWN 720 AM.

Kinetico also uses reverse osmosis systems as well as kinetic degradation fluxion carbon and ion (salt-based) systems to filter and soften water. General manager Steve Devlan said his company offers 25 various systems for area residents to choose from.

Devlan personally thinks using a reverse osmosis system for the whole house is a waste of water.

"I like to tell my customers that the smaller RO system, that goes under the sink and sells for around \$540, is perfect for kitchen and drinking use," Devlan said.

He recommends a softening and conditioning system for the entire house along with the reverse osmosis system.

Kinetico's reverse osmosis system adds a backwash to clean the membranes used during the four-stage process. This extends the membranes' lives.

"We guarantee our membranes to last seven years or we replace them absolutely free of charge," Devlan said.

No matter what device you select, NSF International advises that system owners establish a regular maintenance schedule for changing the filters, which must be followed for the device to operate properly.