

Installing is a one-day job

Plumbing can be stressful

DO IT YOURSELF

BY DOUG SCANCARELLA
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD HOME

Before the recession, bathroom renovation projects typically came in the form of exorbitant overhauls. Today, consumers have become unwilling to part with their dollars, and many are pulling the plug on expensive renovations. There's been a resurgence in DIY installations and/or repair jobs.

Installing your own toilet or replacing one that has seen better days, for example, is becoming commonplace.

"There's a real change in focus," said Sandy Torgersen, a sales manager with Hardware, Bath & Spa, a showroom of high-end, decorative bath and kitchen fixtures in Fairfield. "People are looking to economize. They're discovering that there's a satisfaction to accomplishing something big on their own."

"One reason for installing your own toilet, of course, is money," Torgersen said. "When you hire someone, you have to pay for the service. You could also pay for their drive time and could pay for them to come during off hours.

"When you install it yourself, it's on your own time. It's relatively easy and it can all be completed in one day."

To start, follow these steps:

■ After turning the water off, flush the toilet to empty most to the water. Remove the remaining water with a sponge and a water bucket. Then disconnect the supply line from the base.

■ To remove the old toilet, pop off the trim caps at the base. Next, remove the nut and washers on the closet bolts securing the bowl on the floor.

■ Use a putty knife to pry up and



PHOTO COURTESY OF KOHLER

The Devonshire Comfort Height two-piece toilet from Kohler combines highly efficient flushing technology with subtly traditional styling.

remove the old wax seal. Install the new wax seal and hook the new closet bolts into their slots on the flange.

■ With the closet bolts and seal in place, you can attach and assemble the toilet. Slip the tank bolts through the opening in the bottom of the tank. Line up the shank of bolts with holes in the bowl and drop the tank into place. Secure the tank to the bowl by tightening a nut onto each tank bolt.

■ Set the toilet onto to the flange, making sure that the closet bolts protruding from the floor line up with the holes in the base.

■ Secure the new seal and lift onto the bowl with mounting bolts. Use clip joint pliers to reconnect the supply line at the bottom of the tank.

HIRE A PRO

happens if the nuts are rusted? Bolts sometimes disintegrate because of rust.

"All of the sudden, it's an eight-hour job, with three or four trips to Home Depot thrown in. Doing it yourself can become more expensive than hiring a plumber real quick."

The cost really balloons, he said, if the do-it-yourselfer has to call a plumber in the end, anyway.

Mazzone knows plumbing problems are stressful for a homeowner.

"People get worried because they don't know how much something will cost, how long it will take and how disruptive it will be to their life," he said. "And they get wary, because they don't know who they can trust."

Where to get advice

He recommended calling the town's building inspector.

"One of the most important things to keep in mind is your abilities and skills," Mazzone said. "If you don't know exactly what you need to do, doing it yourself is probably not a good idea.

"If don't have a plumber in mind, call the building inspector. They know the local plumbers. They know who is reliable and dependable and, more importantly, they know who is cutting corners just to make sure something gets up to code."

Mazzone credits positive referrals from building inspectors in and around Saddle Brook with his firm's longevity.

"The way you get a good reputation with the local inspectors and local residents is by backing up your work," he said.

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Dominick Mazzone understands why some people try to install their own toilets instead of calling a plumber.

"People think they're going to save money, and I understand that, especially in these difficult economic times," said Mazzone, owner and founder of Mazzone Plumbing in Saddle Brook. "It's a fairly easy thing to do, if everything goes right."

What can go wrong

"The entire process should take about an hour," he said. "But what happens if the flange is cracked? What