UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI Extension
Live. And Learn.

Water Conservation Practices

The average American uses between 120 and 160 gallons of water each day in and around the house. Nationally we use the most water in the bathroom (toilets use 26.7%) followed closely by the clothes washer (21.7%) and then the shower (16.8%). Leaking faucets and toilets use as much as 13.7% of the water in our homes.

There are several simple things that can be done to reduce water consumption around the home. The first thing is to stop any leaks from faucets or in the stool. This can reduce as much as 20 to 40 gallons of water lost each day.

Bathrooms

With the largest amount of home water use being in the bathroom, we need to focus on activities to reduce water use.

Brushing your teeth: If a person leaves the water running each time they brush their teeth, they waste approximately 2-3 gallons of water each time. If you brush twice each day with the water running you waste 4-6 gallons of water. Turn off the water when brushing and use a glass to rinse. This will save at least 3-5 gallons of water when brushing your teeth.

Shaving: If a man leaves the water running when he shaves he can waste up to 4 gallons of water. Plug the sink and use as little water as necessary to wet your face, rinse your face and razor and clean the sink. Reduce your water use to less than 1 gallon when you shave

Using the stool: Toilets can use from 3 to 6 gallons per flush. Flush when necessary but don't use your toilet as a waste can for getting rid of trash, dead bugs and other materials. If you flush the stool 5 times each day you can easily use close to 25-30 gallons of water.

Conserve water by throwing trash in the trash can instead of flushing it down the stool.

Installing a new multi-size flush type stool allows you to select the amount of water needed to flush the stool 1 gallon or 3.5 gallons. If you can't put in new multi-size flush stools you may want to put a toilet reservoir dam in the stool tank and save 1 gallon of water every time you flush.

Showers or bath: Very few people need to take a shower that is longer than 5 or 6 minutes. Anything over that is being wasteful of water and energy. A normal shower head puts out 5.5 gallons per minute. So a 10-minute shower can use about 55 gallons of water. Some of the newer shower heads can put out as much as 8 gallons of water per minute.

Reduce your shower time to 5 minutes. Replace the old shower heads with a high-efficiency aerated shower heads that only use 2.5 gallons per minute. This can save 3 gallons per minute and only uses 12.5 gallons for a 5 minute shower. Another practice is to get wet, turn off the water, wash and then turn the water back on to rinse.

Instead of taking a 10-minute shower with a shower head that doesn't restrict water flow you can take a bath with as little as 30 gallons of water. It takes very little water to sufficiently clean yourself so lower the water level in the bath tub to a sufficient amount but not extravagant. If you think you need to run a tub of water for a bath you will generally use between 40-65 gallons. In many cases a bath can use less water than a shower if you want to conserve water.

Faucets: replace faucets aerators with the high-efficiency aerated heads to reduce water flow. A normal bathroom faucet runs approximately 2 gallons per minute.

Kitchen Water Use

Automatic dishwashers require approximately 10 to 15 gallons of water per load. Be sure and fill the automatic dishwasher full when you use it. Run the dishwasher only when full to minimize water use.

Hand washing and rinsing would generally need approximately 20 gallons but there are things that can reduce the amount of water. Have a container of rinse water for rinsing the dishes instead of running the faucet. The rinse water can be the colder water that first comes out of the faucet before the hot water is available for use. If you don't like using a container of rinse water then you can turn the faucet off when not rinsing dishes. This can keep the amount of water you use down to a minimum.

Garbage Disposals - The average consumer uses 2-5 gallons of water each time you run the garbage disposal. Reduce the use of your garbage disposal by composting food waste. If you can reduce the use of the garbage disposal by one time each week you can save from 2-5 gallons.

Washing vegetables - The kitchen faucet generally runs 4 to 7 gallons per minute. Don't leave the faucet running when you clean vegetables. Wet them, clean them, rinse them.

Other Household Items

An automatic washer will use approximately 45-50 gallons of water per load. Run full loads or adjust the water level to reduce the amount of water needed for different size loads. Newer washers will normally use less water than older models.

Washing off your drive way or side walk can use 60-120 gallons. A half inch hose carries 7-9 gallons per minute. Clean the drive way or sidewalk with a broom or blower.

Washing your car with a bucket can save 50 gallons of water. Never leave the water running while washing your car. Wet the car, turn off water, wash with a bucket of water, rinse car.

This can save up to 100 gallons of water. Do this on the lawn so excess water is used for the grass. Many automatic carwashes use recycled water and average 12-20 gallons of water to wash your car.

Sweeping sidewalks and driveways instead of washing them with water can save many gallons. So put away the hose and get out the broom and start sweeping.

Water-Friendly Lawn Care Practices

Soil - The best soil for grasses is loose soil, with lots of air spaces for growing roots that can also hold water. Fix compacted soil by aerating your lawn after fertilizing in the spring and fall. This increases the water holding capacity of the yard and reduces the need to water as often.

Watering - If you are going to water, water early in the morning, deeply and infrequently. This allows your grass to grow deep roots, making it healthier and better able to compete with weeds and fight off disease and pests. Watering your lawn on a regular basis can account for 50 percent of the typical household's water consumption. Watering the lawn in the early morning instead of the heat of the day can save 100 gallons per day.

Mulching and Planting – Mulch around trees can save 50-150 gallons of water per tree every 2-3 days. The mulch holds the moisture and reduces evapo-transporation. Plant native flowers that don't need as much extra water during the summer. You can save up to 30 gallons of water in a day by going native.

Water Harvesting and Rain Barrels – much of the water you need for plants and lawn can be collected from rain runoff. Each square foot of your roof produces 0.6 gallons of water for every 1 inch of rain. If your home is 2000 sqft an inch of rain would allow 1200 gallons of rain water to come down the gutters. By collecting and using that water you reduce the drain on the water supply and can help reduce your water bill.

Xeriscaping – landscape with native plants. Many native plants are slow-growing and drought-tolerant and can survive the hot dry season. This helps to conserve water. Select plants based on the site conditions. Native plants generally can thrive in the wet springs and survive during the dry summer.

For more information on watering your lawn see guidesheet G6720 - Home Lawn Watering Guide. http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G6720 .