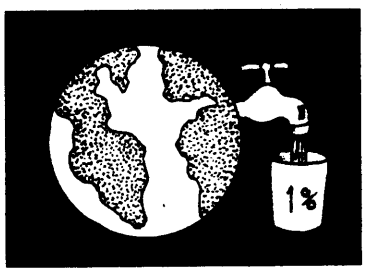
United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of Water
(WH-550)

EPA 570/9-91-100
September 1992

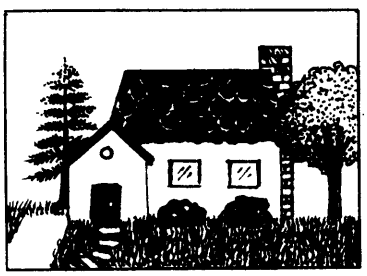
EPA

Fact Sheet: 21 Water Conservation Measures for Everybody



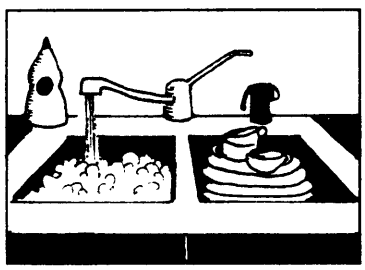
The earth is covered with water, yet only one percent is available for drinking. Unfortunately, many of us take this small percentage for granted. The average adult needs only 2-1/2 quarts of water per day to maintain health, but in the United States, we each use 125 to 150 gallons per day for cooking, washing, flushing, and watering. That's over 40 percent more water than we need to accomplish these tasks. Our wasteful habits not only deplete clean water reserves faster than we can replenish them, but they pollute many waterways, rendering them unfit for human consumption. They also stress aging drinking water and sewage treatment facilities beyond their capacities. In each of the past few years, wastewater treatment systems dumped an estimated 2.3 trillion gallons of inadequately treated sewage into U.S. coastal waters, destroying beaches, fisheries, and other marine life.*

We waste water both by practicing bad habits, like leaving the water running when we brush our teeth, and by using antiquated equipment not built with water conservation in mind. Bad habits can be difficult to change, but new ones can save thousands of gallons of water per year per person. Installing new water-saving equipment and small devices also can save significant amounts of water per household without requiring us to change our daily routines. Many devices are inexpensive, available in local hardware stores, and easy to install. They can save energy (and energy bills) too! By following a few simple steps, a typical family of four can save an astounding 50,000 to 100,000 gallons of water per year. What are we waiting for?



For Every Room in the House

- Repair leaky faucets, indoors and out. One leaky faucet can use up to 4,000 gallons of water per month.
- Install faucet aerators. These inexpensive devices can reduce water use up to 60 percent, while maintaining a strong flow.



In the Kitchen

- When cooking, save 10 to 15 gallons of water per meal by peeling and cleaning vegetables in a large bowl of water instead of under the running tap.
- When handwashing dishes, save 15 gallons of water by soaking dirty dishes in the basin, then rinsing them off.
- Run full-load dishwashers to save 15 gallons per load and hot water costs, too.
- When buying a new dishwasher, select one with a "light-wash" option. Newer models use 20 percent less water than older ones.

*Congress of the United States, Office of Technology Assessment, 1987. Waste in the Marine Environment, Washington, D.C.

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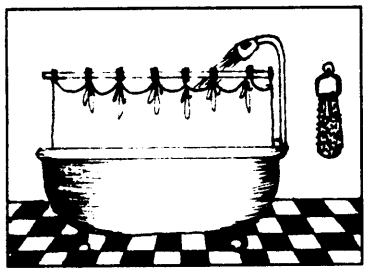
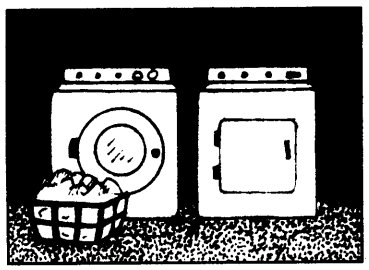


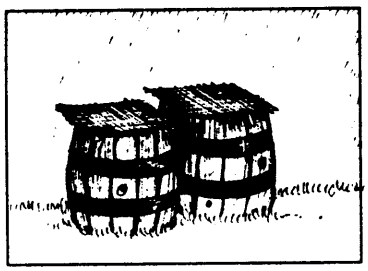
In the Bathroom

- Take short showers instead of baths. Showers use an average of 5 to 7 gallons per minute, three times less than the water used to take a bath.
- Install a low-flow showerhead. This will cut water use in the shower to just 3 gallons per minute and still provide an invigorating flow.
- Turn off the water to brush teeth, shave, and soap up in the shower. Filling the sink to shave uses only 1 gallon, while letting the water run can use 10 gallons per shave or more. Turning off the water when you brush your teeth can save 4 gallons of water each time.
- Repair leaky toilets to save more than 50 gallons of water per day. Add 12 drops of food coloring into the tank. If color appears in the bowl one hour later, the unit is leaking.
- Install a toilet displacement device to save thousands of gallons of water per year or 5 to 7 gallons per flush. Place one to three weighted plastic jugs into the tank, making sure the jugs don't interfere with the flushing mechanism or a suitable flow. Or, instead of jugs, use toilet dams that hold back a reservoir of water during each flush, saving 1 to 2 gallons. Don't use bricks because they can chip and foul the flushing mechanism.
- When buying a new toilet, select a low-flush model that uses less than 1-1/2 gallons of water to flush, saving over 7,000 gallons per year per person.



On Wash Day

- When purchasing a new washing machine, buy a water-saving model that can be adjusted to load-size and has a "suds-saving" option. New models use 40 percent less water than older models.
- For old and new machines, run full loads only.



Taking Water Conservation Outdoors

- Mow your lawn with water retention in mind. Set mower blades on a high setting (2- to 3-inch grass length as opposed to golf-course short) to provide natural ground shade and promote water retention by the soil.
- Water lawn and garden in the morning when evaporation is lowest.
- Water no more than 1 inch per week, applied slowly to prevent runoff. Place several empty cans around the yard when watering to determine how long it will take to water 1 inch.
- Collect rainwater for watering plants using a barrel covered with a screen.
- Plant indigenous species suited to your area and save as much as 54 percent of the water used to care for outdoor plants. Ask your local nursery for plant and grass species that require less water.
- When washing your car, turn off the hose between rinses to save up to 150 gallons per washing.
- Sweep down decks and driveways instead of hosing them down.