Water Conservation Tips

Here are some tips to help reduce your watering needs, saving money and conserving natural resources

Indoors

Low Flow Fixtures
A ten-minute shower can use less water than a full bath.
With a new 2.0 gallon per minute or less (low-flow) shower head, a 10-minute shower will use 20 gallons of water, saving you up to 10 gallons of water over a typical bath. A new, lower flow showerhead will save energy and conserve water — beating out both the bath and an old-fashioned showerhead.

Replacing a standard kitchen or bathroom faucet aerator with a 0.5 GPM low flow aerator can save up to 80 percent less in water consumption.

Installing low-flush toilets (1.28 gallons per flush or lower) and save up to 50 percent.
Standard toilets can be retrofitted with a dual flush system that reduces the amount of water used for liquids and it is less expensive than replacing the whole toilet. Dual flush systems work best with 1.6- to 3.5 gallon per flush (GFP) toilets but can also be used on 1.28 GPF.

Scrape, Don't Scrub Dishes
Save water by scraping dishes instead of rinsing them before loading in the dishwasher. Run your dishwasher with a full load and use the air-dry option if available.
Rinsing dirty dishes before loading your dishwasher uses a lot of water and energy. Most dishwashers today can thoroughly clean dishes that have had food scraped, rather than rinsed, off — the wash cycle and detergent take care of the rest. To make the most efficient use of your dishwasher's energy and water consumption, run the dishwasher only when enough dirty dishes have accumulated for a full load.

Cool Laundry
Wash your laundry with cold water whenever possible. To save water, try to wash full loads or, if you must wash a partial load, reduce the level of water appropriately.
Hot water heating accounts for about 90 percent of the energy your machine uses to wash clothes — only 10 percent goes to electricity used by the washer motor. Depending on the clothes and local water quality (hardness), many homeowners can effectively do laundry exclusively with cold water, using cold water laundry detergents. Switching to cold water can save the average household more than $40 annually (with an electric water heater) and more than $30 annually (with a gas water heater).
Washing full loads can save you more than 3,400 gallons of water each year.

Lawn & Garden

All too often, landscape irrigation wastes water. Properly managing your irrigation system can help you reduce your annual outdoor water use by nearly 8,800 gallons, equivalent to the amount of water used to take 500 showers!

Sprinklers
When it comes to a home's irrigation system, a little maintenance goes a long way. Your system can waste water if it's programmed incorrectly, a sprinkler head is pointed in the wrong direction, or you have a leak.
Check your system for clogged, broken or missing sprinkler heads.
Examine points where the sprinkler heads connect to pipes or hoses. If water pools in your landscape or you have large wet areas, you could have a leak in your system. A leak about as small as the tip of a ballpoint pen (or 1/32nd of an inch) can waste about 6,300 gallons of water per month!
Make sure to direct your sprinklers so that they apply water only to the landscape—not the driveway, house, or sidewalk.
An improperly scheduled irrigation controller can waste water and money. Update your system's watering schedule to align with the seasons.
Test your irrigation system to ensure the zones are programmed correctly.
Testing your soil moisture depth will help determine correct watering.
Typically, sandy soil should be watered 3 times per week for approximately 20 minutes and loamy soil should be watered 2 times per week for 30 minutes each time.

Native Plants
Once established, these plants require little water beyond normal rainfall. Also, because native plants are adapted to local soils and climatic conditions, they rarely require the addition of fertilizer and are more resistant to pests and diseases than are other species. Be careful when selecting exotic species, as some may be invasive, which may require more water and could displace native plants.

Recognize site conditions and plant appropriately.
Areas of the same site may vary significantly in soil type or exposure to sun and wind, as well as evaporation rates and moisture levels. Placing plants that prefer shade in open sun will affect their ability to thrive. Be mindful of a site's exposure to the elements and choose plants that will thrive in the site's conditions.

Group plants according to their water needs.
Grouping vegetation with similar watering needs into specific "hydrozones" reduces water use and protects the plants from both underwatering and overwatering by allowing you to water to each zone's specific needs. For example, turf areas and shrub areas should always be separated into different hydrozones because of their differing water needs.

Turfgrass
Choose turfgrass types that don't use a lot of water, such as low water-using or native grasses and those that can withstand drought. In traditional landscapes, turfgrass receives the highest percentage of irrigation water. This is because the most commonly used varieties of turfgrass require more water than many other plants in the landscape and homeowners tend to overwater turfgrass

Minimize steep slopes.
Slopes can be challenging because of the potential for erosion and runoff. If slopes cannot be avoided in your landscape design, install plantings with deeper root zones such as native ground covers and shrubs to provide stabilization and prevent erosion.

Fertilization
What's the problem with fertilizer?
Fertilizer isn't a problem if it's used carefully. Proper fertilization can create healthy lawns and plants that have strong root systems and increased tolerance to drought. The amount of fertilization needed should be calculated based on lawn size, type, and environmental factors…not simply by product package recommendations.
Use fertilizers sparingly. Many plants do not need as much fertilizer or need it as often as you might think. Don't fertilize before a rain storm. If you use too much fertilizer or apply it at the wrong time, it can easily wash off your lawn or garden into storm drains and then flow untreated into lakes or streams. Just like in your garden, fertilizer in lakes and streams makes plants grow. In water bodies, extra fertilizer can mean extra algae and aquatic plant growth. Too much algae harms water quality and makes boating, fishing and swimming unpleasant. As algae decay, they use up oxygen in the water that fish and other wildlife need.

Consider using organic fertilizers; they release nutrients more slowly. Use commercially available compost or make your own using garden waste. Mixing compost with your soil means your plants will need less chemical fertilizer and puts your waste to good use. Commercial compost and soil amendments may be available from your solid waste or wastewater utility as well as your local garden store.

Apply fertilizers only when necessary and at the recommended amount. Don't apply fertilizer before windy or rainy days. Apply fertilizer as close as possible to the period of maximum uptake and growth for grass and other plants, which is usually spring and fall in cool climate, and early and late summer in warm climates. Avoid applying fertilizer close to waterways.