

30 smart ways to save on your summer water bill

There are many small actions you can take around your house that will save gallons of water.

KITCHEN

1. Wash dishes in the dishwasher, rather than by hand. 'When people wash dishes by hand, they tend to leave the faucet on all the time. With a machine, water isn't running all the time. Hand-washing dinner dishes could easily use 15 to 26 gallons of water; a conventional dishwasher uses 10 to 14 gallons; a new, energy-efficient dishwasher uses 4 to 7 gallons per load.
2. Scrape dishes rather than rinsing them.
3. Wait till the dishwasher is full before turning it on.
4. Install an aerator on your kitchen sink. These inexpensive items (about \$5-\$10) mix air into the water, reducing flow while maintaining pressure. Placing aerators on kitchen and bathroom sinks typically reduces water usage by about 4 percent.
5. Keep a container of water in the refrigerator rather than running the faucet and waiting for the water to get cold.
6. Rinse vegetables in a pan partially filled with water rather than under running water, and reuse the water for watering plants.
7. Defrost food in the refrigerator or microwave rather than running water over it.
8. Compost food scraps when possible (no animal products) rather than running the disposal.

LAUNDRY

9. Replace an old clothes washer with an Energy Star washer. Energy Star is an Environmental Protection Agency designation for appliances that save significant energy. Washers are not currently required to be water-stingy to get an Energy Star designation, but, nevertheless, most Energy Star washers do use 35 to 50 percent less water than other washers. When shopping for a washing machine, look for one with a low Water Factor. After Jan. 1, 2007, water savings will mandatory for a washer to receive the Energy Star designation.

10. In general, run the clothes washer only when it is full. If you must do a smaller load, use the settings to reduce the water level.

BATHROOM

11. Take a shower of no more than five minutes rather than a bath.

12. Install a water-efficient shower head. Replace an existing shower head if a 1-gallon bucket placed under the flow takes less than 20 seconds to fill.

13. Do not leave the faucet running while brushing teeth or shaving. With this simple change in behavior, an individual can save 1,200 gallons per year.

14. Do not use the toilet as a wastebasket.

15. Replace an old toilet (1993 or earlier model) with a new, low-flow toilet. Installing a more efficient model will save the typical household from 8,000 to 21,000 gallons of water a year.

16. If you can't replace an old toilet, reduce the amount of water it uses by placing a plastic bottle filled with water in the tank to displace water. Do not put a brick in the tank.

17. Twenty percent of all toilets leak, according to the American Water Works Association. Here's an easy way to check for a leak in the tank: Place a few drops of food dye in the tank; check the bowl 15 minutes later; if there's color in the bowl, there's a leak. Replacing the flapper will often fix the problem.

OUTDOORS

18. Water your lawn and garden only when they need it. Most lawns receive twice as much water as they need. In addition to being a major waste of water, daily watering causes shallow root growth, which is bad for plants. Water 1 inch every five to seven days in the summer and every 15-20 days in winter.

19. Water lawns early in the morning. Do not water on windy days to avoid water loss to evaporation.

20. Water in several short sessions rather than one long one to allow for better absorption of the water and to prevent runoff.

21. Adjust an automatic sprinkler system at least once a month.

22. Make sure sprinkler heads are working correctly and not watering the driveway or street.

23. Use drip irrigation to water shrubs, and vegetable and flower gardens. Much less water is lost to evaporation with drip systems than spray systems.

24. Mulch gardens and shrubs. (It's good for the plants, as well as being a water saver.)

25. Reduce the size of your lawn, and xeriscape other portions of your yard, using plants that prosper with very little water. In addition to conserving resources, xeriscapes are low-maintenance (they conserve your resources, too). If this is too drastic for you, create water zones. Have a cluster of low-water plants and reduce the water to that area accordingly.

26. Aerate clay soils to improve water retention and prevent runoff.

26. Cover pools and spas when not in use. A pool left uncovered loses about 1,000 gallons a month to evaporation.

27. Thinking about installing an artificial pond or fountain? Even though these features are usually designed to recirculate water, they lose large quantities of water to evaporation.

28. Use a broom rather than a hose to clean sidewalks and driveways.

MISCELLANEOUS

29. Take your car to a carwash to be cleaned rather than washing it in your driveway. The detergents you use to wash your car at home end up in the storm drains and eventually local creeks, where they are an ecohazard. Commercial washes are required to send waste water through the sanitary sewer system.

30. Monitor your water meter, and check your household, including pools, spas and outdoor spigots, for leaks. Here's an easy way to determine if you have any leaks: When you are going to be leaving your home for a day or two, turn off all appliances that would use water, such as ice makers or humidifiers. Note the reading on your water meter and check it when you return. If it's changed, there's a leak somewhere.