

Water Conservation Facts and Tips

With more than 10,000 lakes, Minnesota appears on the surface to have a more than adequate supply of water. However, water is our most precious resource and is too often taken for granted. In a dry summer or time of drought, increasing demand from domestic, agricultural, and industrial water users can strain water resources and municipal water supply systems.

Water conservation can reduce the demand placed upon our rivers, lakes, and aquifers while at the same time saving water customers money by reducing water bills. Here are some facts and tips to conserve water:

Bathroom

Toilets:

- Toilets can account for up to 30% of all indoor water use.
- It's estimated that up to 20% of toilets leak.
- Pre-1994 toilets may be flushing at a rate of 3.5 to 7 gallons per flush.
- Placing a plastic jug of water in an older toilet tank displaces toilet flows and can save up to 1,000 gallons of water per person per year.
- Most new toilets are "low flow", 1.6 gallons per flush or less, costing a typical family 7,900 – 21,700 gallons per year less than a pre-1994 toilet.
- Your toilet is not a trashcan - don't use it to flush away Kleenex, food leftovers, etc.
- Check for toilet leaks regularly and make repairs promptly.
- Put a few drops of food coloring in your tank. If colored water shows in the bowl without flushing, there's a leak and repairs are needed.
- Take the cover off the toilet tank and make sure water isn't filling above the "max" fill line and going down the drain.

Bathing:

- A shower generally uses an average of 20 gallons less water than a bath.
- Children only need the bath tub about 1/4th full to be covered with water and for their bath toys to float.
- Most showers can be fitted with a low-volume shower head (2.5 gallons per minute or less) to conserve water.
- Don't turn the shower on until you're ready to step in.

Sink:

- Don't leave water running while washing your face, shaving or brushing your teeth.

Kitchen

Cooking:

- Don't use running water to thaw frozen foods. Plan ahead and thaw foods in the refrigerator beforehand.
- Instead of letting the water run while peeling and cleaning vegetables, rinse them briefly and clean them in a bowl of water. The water in the bowl can then be used to water houseplants.
- Keep a jug of water cooling in the refrigerator so that you don't have to let the faucet run for a cold drink.

Washing Dishes:

- A dishwasher can use up to 25 gallons per load.
- When washing dishes by hand, use a stopper in the sink and don't rinse with running water.
- Run your dishwasher only when you have a full load.
- Reduce the rinsing you do before loading the dishwasher.
- Use the prewash, rinse-hold and scrub cycles of your dishwasher only when necessary.

Laundry

- Clothes washers can use up to 30-35 gallons per cycle.
- If your washer has a variable load control, always adjust water levels to fit the size of the load. This saves both water and the energy needed to heat the extra hot water.
- A high efficiency washing machine can use up to 30% less water and 50% less energy.
- Run your washer when you have a full load.
- Remember that in soft water clothes get cleaner and require less detergent and less rinse water.
- When buying a new washing machine, look for models with water or energy-saving controls.

Around the House

- Check every faucet for leaks. Just a slow drip can waste 15 or 20 gallons a day.
- Use a broom, not the hose, to clean the garage, sidewalks, and driveway. Wash the car from a bucket. Use the hose only to rinse it off afterwards.
- Save water and energy by insulating hot water pipes to cut the amount of time it takes for hot water to reach the tap.
- A water softener that regenerates on a demand basis instead of on a timer will save water and salt.

Lawn and Yard

- Early morning is the best time to water most lawns. That way less water is lost to evaporation and grass and leaves get a chance to dry off once the sun comes up.
- A lush green lawn requires 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water a week. Keep in mind the amount of rainfall that might fall on your yard and adjust your watering schedule accordingly.
- If you let your grass grow taller in the summer, water loss will be reduced because the blades will provide shade for the roots.
- Avoid watering when windy or in the heat of the day.
- Don't allow sprinklers to run unattended. Use a timer as a reminder when it's time to move or turn off the sprinkler.
- Lawns that are frequently aerated absorb water better.
- High nitrogen fertilizers stimulate lawn growth and increase water requirements.
- Mulch shrubs and other plantings so the soil holds moisture longer.
- When possible, flood irrigate vegetables and flower gardens rather than using sprinklers. Irrigation allows deeper soaking with less water. Sprinklers result in high evaporation loss of water.
- Consider "xeriscaping", a form of landscaping or gardening that reduces or eliminates the need for watering or irrigation.

These water conservation facts and tips are provided by information from the American Water Works Association and Minnesota Rural Water Association. For more information on other conservation resources, visit their websites at www.awwa.org and www.mrwa.com

