

## Use water wisely to support a healthier world

By Teddi Nicolaus

**T**he water we need to live is becoming increasingly scarce. Some might find that hard to believe, as water covers about 71% of the Earth and flows freely from our faucets. But fresh water is a limited resource.

Less than 1% of all the water on Earth is available for human use. The rest is either too salty or frozen in ice caps and glaciers. Clean, fresh water will grow even more scarce as the world's population grows and climate change brings drier, hotter weather.

If you want proof, check out the decades-long "megadrought" that's been parching the U.S. West and Southwest. There, dwindling water and extreme heat have joined to create the driest period in more than 1,200 years and is endangering water resources for millions of people.

Water supports all human, plant and animal life. We use water to grow crops, raise the animals we eat and keep us healthy. Water scarcity is an increasing problem globally.

"No matter where you live, water should be a matter of concern for everyone," says David Todd, MA, a water efficiency expert at the California Department of Water Resources. "Using water also uses electricity, so using less water saves water, saves energy, saves money and reduces greenhouse gas emissions."

### Every drop of water counts

You might have turned on the tap today to shower, shave, brush your teeth, mop, cook, wash dishes, do laundry or water your plants.

But have you considered how much water you used?

The average American uses about 82 gallons of water a day at home. Toilets are the biggest water hogs



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in the house. Newer, more water-efficient toilets can use as little as 1.2 gallons per flush. But older ones swallow up as much as seven gallons. That means they use more than those big blue bottles that sit on top of office water dispensers each time you flush.

Just turning off the faucet when you brush your teeth will save about four gallons of water. If it helps, slap a sticky note to the mirror over the bathroom sink as a reminder to turn off the tap while brushing.

Keep in mind that letting water run without good reason also wastes money. Water doesn't just magically flow from your faucets. You pay a pretty penny for the energy, labor and infrastructure required to

bring water to your home and take it away as wastewater. Doing full loads of laundry, using eco-friendly settings and adjusting your water heater to 120 degrees can save you hundreds of dollars a year.

### Flush away your bad habits

"With climate change, the dice are being rolled and we don't know how they're going to come up," Todd says. "We are now seeing droughts occur in places where they never happened before or have been extremely rare."

The good news is there are lots of things you can do to conserve water and protect this precious resource now and for future generations. Make it a habit to:

- ◆ Take shorter showers. The average shower lasts about eight minutes and gobbles up about 16 gallons of water. You'll still get squeaky clean with a five-minute shower.

"Turn off the water when you're

soaping up," Todd says, and set a timer if it helps. Prefer baths? Hop on in, but fill the tub only halfway or less. "You can use up to 70 gallons of water when you take a bath."

- ◆ Fix leaks. In the average household, leaks can send nearly 10,000 gallons of water down the drain every year. Worn toilet flappers are a common culprit, as are leaky faucets. Just one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons of H<sub>2</sub>O per year.

- ◆ Let your dishwasher do the dirty work. An Energy Star-certified dishwasher uses less than half the energy used when you wash a sinkful of dirty dishes by hand, and saves

more than 8,000 gallons of water each year, especially if you run full loads.

- ◆ Don't overwater. Up to about half of domestic drinking water is used to water yards and gardens. Plants and grass can only use so much water. The rest will run down your driveway and sidewalk into the storm drain.

Remember to turn off the sprinkler. Watering with a sprinkler using a standard garden hose for one hour uses about 1,020 gallons of water. If you have a home, look into rain barrels that can collect roof water and use that to water your plants.



### Look for the label

If you're in the market to buy a new water-efficient toilet, showerhead or faucet, look for products bearing the WaterSense label. WaterSense is a partnership program through EPA that helps consumers make budget and environmentally friendly choices.

WaterSense products are certified to be at least 20% more water efficient than average products in that category. Even better, many WaterSense partners offer rebates for products. Use the online WaterSense product search tool to find products in a range of prices and styles.



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