

50 Ways to Conserve Water at Home

With many areas of the country in drought conditions – some severe – and others sure to follow, all of us could use a reminder list of ways to cut back on our water consumption around the house.

None of the following steps are as difficult as the results of a drought could be, and as far as disasters go, a severe drought can be the worst. You can go three weeks without food, but only three days without **W.A.T.E.R.**:

Waste: “Waste not, want not.” Tighten plumbing leaks and prevent other needless losses of water.

Application: Where do you use water that you don’t need to?

Teaching: It’s good you’re following these suggestions, but what about others? Pass these along.

Economy: Where do you need to use water that you could use less?

Reclamation: Where can you get extra water?

Though the following steps fall into the categories just mentioned, we’ve mixed them up in no particular order to encourage you to read them all. These are excerpts from “Disaster Prep 101.”

1. **Fire Safety.** Summer brings us heat and dryness that leads to wildfires and winter sees increased house fires from the use of additional heating sources. As a sizable fire would need hundreds or thousands of gallons of water to fight, any fire prevention steps taken are water saving steps.
2. **Brick in the toilet.** A brick in the toilet tank is meant to take up space to replace water. If a brick takes up about half a quart of space, then you save half a quart per flush. Hint: Since bricks can dissolve, paint it with basement water sealant. Another hint: If you can’t fit a whole brick in your tank, use half a brick. Just make sure nothing blocks your valves or causes a leak.
3. **Color coded conservation.** You don’t always have to flush your toilet each and every time. To borrow an old adage, “If it’s yellow let it mellow, if it’s brown flush it down.”
4. **Buy a low-flow toilet.** Though an expensive option, it’s easy to incorporate into your lifestyle, and in fact, some communities offer homeowners rebates for installing these water-savers.
5. **Rain barrels.** Rain barrels can help save rain water that otherwise would have come down your gutters and soaked into the ground. While you can’t immediately drink this water, you can use it in your food gardens, for outside washing (like if your car *really* needs it), and you can purify it for drinking or bathing if you’d like.
6. **AC condensation.** If you have central heat and air, you have a drain line that carries away the condensation that collects from your air conditioner coils. If yours is not connected to sewage lines you can collect and use this water. However, **DO NOT DRINK THIS WATER!** It can be used, though, to water your garden, outside washing, or watering the house plants. You can collect up to two quarts per day during humid weather.
7. **Squeeze-handle shower head.** You can buy shower setups that have the head on a hose, and the head is activated with a squeeze lever. This will let you wet down, lather up, and then rinse off without leaving the shower running. If the squeeze-handle variety won’t work for you, you can easily find low-flow shower heads that provide the same pressure but use less water overall.
8. **Faucet restrictors.** Like the low-flow shower head, you can also find low-flow faucet restrictors.
9. **Liquid soap.** For hand washing, nothing saves water like liquid soap since it lathers more quickly than bar soap. Squirt a small dollop of liquid soap, give a quick burst from the faucet, thoroughly lather, and then turn the faucet back on briefly to rinse.
10. **Spray bottles.** Keep a small spray bottle of water by the sink. When washing your hands (with liquid soap), or wetting your toothbrush, all you need is a quick spritz from the bottle instead of using the faucet.
11. **Plastic gloves.** We’re talking about the inexpensive plastic foodservice gloves that come 100 to a box for just a couple of dollars. If there’s anything you’d do that would make you wash your hands before, during, or afterwards (like painting, cleaning the cat’s litter box, etc.), then wearing gloves will save a hand washing.
12. **Paper plates.** In times of drought; water takes temporary precedence over other resources. Using paper plates saves dishwashing water. The same goes for paper towels which will cut down on the number of cloth hand towels you have to wash.
13. **Keep a jug by the sink.** Keep an empty water jug by the sink to catch and save cold water coming from the tap while you’re waiting for the hot water.

14. **Consolidate heavy work.** Do you do things at different times of day that make you sweaty? On some days do you take more than one shower or change clothes a couple of times? Consolidate these laborious efforts. If you work out regularly and also work in the yard, try to work out and then immediately do your yard work. Stay sweaty, take just one shower, and wear just one set of clothes.
15. **Waterless car wash.** Several companies produce “waterless carwash” products that let you spray them on and wipe them off leaving your car spotless without the use of water.
16. **Disposable paint brushes.** If you have to paint, try to use zero water. Wear your plastic gloves and use brushes you can just throw away.
17. **No lawn watering.** This goes without saying. However, if you collected the rain water or AC condensation earlier, you might use a watering can to cure brown spots, or water shrubs or trees that might die.
18. **Check faucet washers.** Another no-brainer is to make sure you have no leaky faucets. However, a word of caution. Know what you’re doing before tackling the repairs yourself since a plumbing accident could spew more water than your faucet would ever drip.
19. **Full dish washer.** Letting the dishes pile up is okay if you’re waiting for enough to make a full load for the dishwasher.
20. **Full clothes washer.** Full loads of laundry are best as they’re more water-efficient.
21. **Hand wash over dishes.** If you’re letting dishes pile up and some need some presoaking, use the kitchen sink for hand washing. Let the soapy water accumulate and pull double duty by pre-cleaning your dishware.
22. **Dig a well.** If you’re on municipal water, yet live in an area where you can have a well, please dig one. Though pricey, it will give you an alternate source of water and will help conserve city water.
23. **Dixie cups.** These tiny cups can let you see how much (or little) water you need for things like rinsing after brushing your teeth. And since they’re disposable, you don’t have to wash.
24. **Pass this list to a friend.** It’s good that you’re reading this list. Passing it along to others helps them conserve too. With conservation, it really is “the more the merrier.”
25. **No new aquariums.** If the kids come home wanting anything more than a fishbowl for a new aquatic pet, do what you can to talk them out of it. Unless of course, you fill it and maintain it with rainwater.
26. **Nuke your water.** For some hot water needs it’s thriftier to fill a cup with cold water and zap it in the microwave to heat it, rather than let the water run until the hot water shows.
27. **Shave from a cup.** One use for your cup of hot water is shaving. Rather than let the water run during a shave, just rinse your razor in the cup. Too, you’ll use less water in a cup than you would by having an inch or two in the bottom of the sink. Better yet, if possible, use an electric razor.
28. **Skip a shower.** If you’re not dirty and you’re not going to do anything but hang around the house, especially if by yourself, why take a shower?
29. **Let the kids skip a bath.** If you want to be a hero to your children, provided they’re really not dirty and don’t need it, let them skip every other day’s bath or shower.
30. **Baking soda for Fido.** Your dog’s baths can be a little farther apart too, if you give them a dry rubdown with baking soda in the interim. Rub it in their fur and then brush it out. They’ll smell lots better, and be happy they skipped a soaking.
31. **Nuke a washcloth.** Wet a washcloth with a quick blast from the faucet, add some liquid soap, and zap it in the microwave for a few seconds. You could wash your face and hands, and probably take half a bath. Wet another washcloth and microwave it a few seconds for a quick rinse cloth.
32. **Paper towel dry-off.** After your sponge bath with your microwaved washcloths, dry off with paper towels. Like paper plates, they don’t need washing.
33. **Kiddie pools.** If you’re lacking rain barrels and want to catch a few drops, get one of those rigid plastic “kiddie pools.” They’re only a few dollars and will hold gallons of rain runoff from your gutter downspouts.
34. **Solar showers.** Have a private back yard? Like being outdoors? You can get “solar showers” at almost any camping supply store (it’s a black plastic jug with a shower head on a hose). You can use your collected rain water for that occasional warm-weather outdoor shower.
35. **No swimming pool.** Yet another entry in our no-brainer list, everyone knows that you save lots of water by not filling your swimming pool. But how could you use existing pool water in a water shortage? The chlorine will evaporate in a few weeks if not maintained, but not enough to drink the water. However, you could use the water for outdoor washing, your outdoor shower, flushing your toilet, or as a firefighting water reservoir if your home is in a wildfire area.

36. **Check your meter.** Check for leaks at your water meter. If yours is leaking, notify your local water authority. Also, many meters have flow indicators that move when water is flowing through the pipe even slightly. If you've turned off everything in the house and the flow indicator is moving, you might have a hidden leak.
37. **Check for a leaky toilet.** Put a few drops of food coloring into your toilet tank's water. If you see the colored water in the bowl after a few minutes it means you have a leak and might need a new tank valve. Hint: Some toilet tank valves are degraded or corroded by the chlorine contained in many toilet bowl tank cleaner / additives. When in doubt, leave them out.
38. **Tie up a tarp.** If you're really serious about collecting rain water, tie a few tarps in place to where they drain into your kiddie pool or other collection point.
39. **Frozen water bottles.** Keep plastic bottles of water (about 3/4 full) in your fridge and freezer (you'll save electricity since your fridge will run more efficiently). When going on picnics or using your cooler, use a few frozen bottles of water to keep food cold. The water in the bottles can be consumed when thawed (or refrozen), while ice will melt and be dumped out.
40. **Water at restaurants.** If you don't plan to drink it, don't let the waiter leave you a glass of water at the table.
41. **Dishes: wipe vs. rinse.** If the dishes are too dirty to stick straight in the dishwasher, wipe them off with newspaper rather than rinsing them. You save water and get double-duty from your newspaper.
42. **Let Fido lick the bowl.** If you have a dog, let Fido clean your dishes before they're put in the dishwasher. (Just don't give Fido too much, or anything bad for a dog.)
43. **Aluminum foil.** When cooking at home, line your pots and pans with aluminum foil. When you're done cooking, remove the foil to make cleanup easier.
44. **Buying your water.** If you buy your drinking water, go for the gallons of distilled water rather than the smaller bottles of mineral water. The distilled is a better value and is actually more pure than the "designer waters."
45. **Bug sprayers.** Your lawn and garden store will have 2-gallon pump-up sprayers. Most cost less than \$20 and will help you use your collected rain water or pool water for washing (and even fighting small fires).
46. **"Go Jo."** Go Jo is a waterless hand soap that mechanics use. It's rather effective on really dirty hands and can be used completely without water. Similarly, you can use the little bottles of clear hand sanitizer.
47. **In-line water heater.** In-line water heaters can be installed closer to the faucets or tubs they're to heat, and they use less energy. If you get one, great, but don't do away with your old water heater (even if you cut off the gas or electric to it) since it's a great backup reservoir in water shortage scenarios.
48. **No mopping.** Most households now have a "Swiffer" or comparable cleaning aid intended to replace old-fashioned mops. If you haven't made the switch, doing so will save a few gallons of water per year.
49. **Skip a laundry load.** Once in a while, some clothing really doesn't need to be washed. In mild weather, outer shirts might need just a "fluff in the dryer" or another ironing to be perfectly ready to wear. Bachelors have known this secret for years.
50. **General safety.** We started this article with fire safety and we'll close with general safety. Each time you prevent a trip to the hospital, you prevent the extra water that would be used during your visit, even if it's just from the doctor washing up to examine you.

Water is like money. We should learn to save it well and spend it wisely. We hope these simple ideas prove useful, and we invite you to check back for our next article which will cover municipal water savings.

© 2007 Paul Purcell. About the author: Paul Purcell is an Atlanta-based security analyst and preparedness consultant with over 20 years risk management experience. He's also the author of "Disaster Prep 101" at www.disasterprep101.com, and a partner / advisor with 1-800-PREPARE.

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