Water Saving Tips in Your Home

If 100 litres represents the world's water, about half a teaspoon of it is fresh water available for our use (Smartwater.com.au). Therefore it is important to reduce our usage of this precious resource. In addition to saving money on your water bill, water conservation helps prevent water pollution in nearby lakes and rivers. If we all reduce the amount of water we use by even a small amount, the collective difference is enormous. The following information includes easy to apply water saving techniques for your home.

For information on current water restrictions, head to: http://www.sydneywater.com.au/SW/water-the-environment/what-we-re-doing/water-restrictions/index.htm

In the kitchen

- Use a plug in the sink when preparing vegetables, washing fruit or washing dishes by hand.
- To avoid wasting drinking water from a running tap, collect it in a bottle or jug and store it in the fridge until it is cool enough to drink.
- Put suitable food scraps into a composter or worm farm rather than down the kitchen sink.
- When boiling vegetables, use enough water to cover them and keep the lid on the saucepan. Your vegetables will boil quicker and it will save you water, power, and preserve precious vitamins in the food.

Dishwashers

- Only use your dishwasher when it is full.
- Choose water efficient appliances.
- Don't rinse dishes before loading dishwasher.

Dish-washing

- When washing dishes by hand, don't rinse them under a running tap. If you have two sinks, fill the second one with rinsing water.
- Use washing-up liquid sparingly as this will reduce the amount of rinsing required when washing dishes by hand.
- Soak pots and pans instead of letting the water run while you scrape them clean.

In the bathroom

Bathroom use accounts for about 75% of the water used inside the home.

Showers

- Limit your time in the shower. Use a 4-minute egg timer to help.
- Installing a water efficient showerhead can save over 10,000L of water per person per year
- Don't waste water while you wait for the hot tap to warm up. Keep a bucket handy to catch the water and use it on indoor plants or in the garden.
- Insulate hot water pipes to lessen the time (and water) wasted waiting for it to heat up.
- To calculate how much water your showerhead is emitting, follow these simple steps:
    1. Place a bucket under the showerhead,
    2. Turn on both taps to full flow,
    3. Run the water for 10 seconds before turning off, capturing all of the water in the bucket,
    4. Measure the amount of water captured,
    5. Multiply this amount by six to calculate the flow rate per minute,
    6. If the flow-rate is greater than 9L per minute, it is worth considering upgrading your showerhead.

Brushing your teeth

- A running tap can use about 8L of water per minute. Simply wet your toothbrush before you begin and use a glass of water to rinse your mouth.

Washing machines

- 15-20% of all water consumed in the home is used in the laundry, making this room a high consumer of not only water but also energy and detergents.
- Only use with a full load, and adjust the water level to suit – reducing your washing by just one load a week can save up to 120L.
- If you are buying a new washing machine, make sure it has at least a four-star water efficiency rating.
- Generally front loaders are more water efficient than top loaders. Over one year, from loaders use around 3000L less than top loaders.
- Washing dark clothes in cold water saves both on water and energy while it helps your clothes to keep their colours.

Toilets

- Toilets use 9% of all water used in an average home.
- For a family of four, installing a dual flush toilet can save more than 35,000 L of water a year.
- If you can't afford a new toilet, an option is to put an inch of sand or gravel inside two plastic bottles to weigh them down, fill them with water and put them in your toilet tank, safely away from the operating mechanism. This will reduce the amount of water per flush.
- Avoid flushing household rubbish down the toilet and put it in the bin instead.
- To check if your toilet is leaking, place a few drops of food colour in the cistern. Without flushing it, look for colour in the toilet bowl.

In the garden

With over 40% of household water used outside the home, it is important you ensure you are watering efficiently. Water from your irrigation system can be wasted through evaporation and wind drift, putting water where it is not needed, such as footpaths. The following tips are for watering efficiently:

- Only water before 9am or after 6pm – better in the morning as it allows the water to soak to the roots and be available to the plant throughout the day when they need it most.
- For pop up sprinklers, keep to 10 minutes per station.
- Put an empty tuna can on your lawn when sprinkling – when the can is full, you have watered the right amount.
- During winter, your irrigation system should be turned off.
- Apply only enough water to moisten the root zone of your plants (6-8 inches deep), then allow the soil to dry before watering again.
- Use drip irrigation for shrub beds, gardens and trees – applies water directly to the root.
- When planting a new lawn, choose an appropriate variety. 'Palmetto' and 'Sir Walter' are drought tolerant and suitable for the Sydney region.

Other gardening tips:

- Weed management: consider less-toxic approaches then a chemical herbicide.
- Mulch – will slow evaporation and discourage weed growth.
- Plant native gardens as they attract native birds and butterflies while saving you money.
- When you clean your fish tank, use the 'old' nitrogen and phosphorous-rich water on your plants – plants love it!!
- Adjust your lawn mower to a higher setting. A taller lawn shades roots and holds soil moisture better than if it is closely clipped.
- Water only when necessary – more plants die from over-watering than from under-watering

(Enviroscapela.com)

Pool and spa

- Introduce a rainwater tank to fill your pool. Alternatively, rainwater diverters attached to your downpipe are an inexpensive substitute to installing a tank.
- Reduce evaporation from the pool's surface by covering it. This also makes the water warm, and prevents debris from falling in.
- Shield your pool from wind using thick hedges or solid fences, to reduce evaporation.
- Use a grease pencil to mark the water level of your pool at the skimmer. Check the mark 24 hours later. Your pool should lose no more than ¼ inch each day.

Cleaning

- Use a broom, brush or rake to sweep and clean outdoor paths instead of hosing them.
- Use a waterless carwash service. Alternatively, use your captured 'warm-up' water or a commercial carwash that minimises water use.

Alternative water sources

Grey water

- A greywater system can help you save water by irrigating your garden with water from the bath, shower, or washing machine
- Even a bucket in your shower tipped onto the garden counts
- Take care to collect and use it safely by doing your research before you get started:
    - http://www.water.vic.gov.au/saving/home/greywater
    - http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/water/reusing-and-recycling-water

Rainwater tanks

- An average 2000L capacity rainwater tank can save up to 59,000L of water a year if the tank is plumbed in for internal uses such as clothes washing or toilet flushing.
- An ideal rainwater tank installation for an average Sydney home would:
    - Store at least 2,500L of rainwater,
    - Be connected to over 75% of the available roof area,
    - Have an energy efficient pump and distribution system,
    - Supply rainwater to at least one toilet and the washing machine.

Other tips

- Make sure your hot water system thermostat is not set too high.
- Leaking taps can usually be fixed with a new washer, this is easy to do. Just remember to turn the water off at the mains before you start.
- Install aerators on your taps – really cheap and very effective
- If the tap still drips, call a plumber. The cost incurred will save you money on your water bills in the long run.
- Use your water meter to check for hidden water leaks: read the house water meter before and after a two-hour period when no water is being used. If the meter does not read exactly the same, there is a leak.