



Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
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Wise Water Conservation Tips Summer and Early Fall

As the temperatures rise during the summer months, our consumption of water increases dramatically. We swim in pools, water our lawns, wash our cars, and cool off with sprinklers. Listed below are some outdoor and indoor water conservation ideas that are simple and easy to follow. Let's all do our part and practice year-round wise water use to maximize our existing water resources and the existing infrastructure used to provide a safe and reliable water supply.

Outdoor Water Conservation

[Prioritize Your Summertime Watering Needs Outdoors](#)

Now is a great time for you to prioritize the watering needs of all outdoor plants and trees. Take the time to determine which area of your yard needs the most water.

[Newly Planted Trees, Shrubs, Lawns](#)

Newly planted trees, shrubs, and lawns should receive the first priority when it comes to determining the need for water. While most plants and bushes are not planted until spring, those planted the previous year may not have time to develop extensive root systems. They usually depend only on surface water for their survival. Even during drought conditions, newly planted trees and shrubs can be over watered. Excess water can flood the root systems by replacing the oxygen with water. Check the root zone moisture by probing the soil 4 to 5 inches with a screwdriver, metal rod, or pipe. You might also try a simple electronic probe to measure soil moisture and indicate when you should water. On automatic sprinkler systems, install a moisture sensor, which will automatically cut off the system if it should begin to rain.

It is best to water early in the morning when temperatures and wind speed are the lowest. This reduces losses from evaporation. Mulching also reduces losses from evaporation and keeps the soil and roots cool. Remember that a slow trickle from your hose is the most effective method for absorption; watering with a hose at full strength usually results in run-off.

[Young Trees and Shrubs](#)

Young trees and shrubs do not have as developed root systems as their older counterparts and will require more water as a result. During severe drought conditions, plants and trees up to six years of age may require additional watering during this time. Established trees and shrubs require one to two inches of water every 10 to 14 days during dry periods.



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Keep weeds out of flower and vegetable gardens

Weeds begin to appear around summertime and warmer weather. Weeds are notorious for stealing water away from other plants, so if you'll keep their populations in check, you won't have to water as often. With lawns, remove weeds by hand whenever possible to avoid competition for water.

Flowers, Gardens, and Older Plants

Most flower and vegetable gardens will require watering to stay productive. Mulching can help to retain additional moisture in the soil and around the roots. Most well-established trees and shrubs can withstand a prolonged period without rain or watering. Far more plants die from over-watering than under-watering. For many garden plants, the best way to know if plants need water is to let your finger be the guide. Dig down several inches near the base of the plant. If the soil is bone dry, that's an indication that you need to water. Also, when a plant begins to show signs of wilting, especially in the morning, it probably needs water.

Lawns

As the summertime approaches, a healthy and well-maintained lawn becomes a focus. Lawns can tolerate long periods of drought by becoming dormant. Because a 5,000 sq. foot lawn may need up to 6,000 gallons of water per week to stay green – an expensive undertaking – it is easier to let lawns sleep through the drought than to waste water, money, and effort. Be sure to reduce foot traffic during this time. Avoid walking on grass during periods of drought stress. If mowing becomes necessary, mow lawns as little as possible during droughts to avoid additional stress, and cut at the highest possible setting. Never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade in one mowing. Allow mulched clippings to remain on the lawn to help cool the soil and retain moisture.

Don't over-water your lawn. As a general rule, your lawn only needs one inch of water every 5 to 7 days. Try placing a small empty tuna can near your sprinkler system; this will help you to determine when to turn the sprinkler off. When the can is full, you have watered approximately one inch. Water lawns during the early morning hours when temperatures and wind speed are the lowest. This reduces losses from evaporation.

Avoid over-fertilizing the lawn. The application of fertilizers increases the need for water. Apply fertilizers that contain slow-release, water in-soluble forms of nitrogen.



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Washing Cars

Wash cars with a pail of water and use a hose with a trigger nozzle to rinse. If your local ordinances permit, consider washing your car on the grass; this will water the lawn at the same time.

Outdoor Pools

Cover an outdoor pool when not in use. Clean the pool filter regularly.

Water without waste

Stop watering whenever runoff occurs, especially on slopes or on compacted, dry soils. That may mean turning the water on and off in cycles to allow moisture to soak into the ground, but it beats watching the water flow down the street.

Capture and recycle rainwater

Place rain barrels or buckets beneath your downspouts. 1,000 sq. ft. of roof surface will collect 420 gallons of water in every inch of rainfall. You can use rainwater for outdoor plants and trees or to wash your car.

Redirect water from downspouts

Channel storm water across lawns and into garden beds away from your house; consider "Rainscaping" by establishing a watershed-friendly garden, which will use snowmelt or stormwater to thrive and create beauty around your home, school, or office.

Mulch, Mulch, Mulch

Mulching helps to slow the evaporation of moisture from the soil and keeps the soil and roots cool. It also protects the soil and roots from events such as freezing. Try to stick with organic mulches that slowly break down and add organic matter to the soil.

Add Hydrogels

Add hydrogels to plants that dry out quickly; these water-absorbing polymer crystals swell to several times their original size and slowly release water into the surrounding soil. Hydrogels can be found at your local garden center.

Indoor Wise Water Use Ideas In the Bathroom

Check pipes and faucets for leaks

Even small leaks can waste significant amounts of water. Water leaks are not only a waste of water, but also of the energy needed to heat the water.



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[Turn off the water when brushing teeth or shaving](#)

This is a hard habit to break. We all are guilty of letting the water run while we brush our teeth. Yet, collectively we could save thousands of gallons of water a day if we just turned off the faucet until we need it.

[Take showers instead of baths](#)

Baths use more water than a typical shower. If your shower has a single hand control or shut off valve, turn off the flow while soaping or shampooing.

[Install low flow showerheads and faucet aerators](#)

Look for ones that use no more than 2.5 gallons per minute at maximum flow (for showerheads) and 2.2 gallons per minute maximum flow (for faucets).

[Check the toilet for leaks](#)

Leaks inside a toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day. Toilet leaks can be detected by taking the tank cover off and placing several drops of food coloring in the tank. You have a leak if you see the coloring in the bowl after a few minutes. Most leaks involve the rubber flapper or shut off valve found in the tank. Repair as soon as possible.

[Don't use the toilet as a wastebasket](#)

Many of us throw a piece of paper, tissues, or other small items into the toilet, instead of a wastebasket. Place a wastebasket next to your toilet to avoid this situation in the future.

Kitchen and Laundry

[Run the dishwasher and washing machine only when full](#)

Dishwashers and washing machines use a tremendous amount of water. Practice wise water techniques by making the most of the water that you use.

[Use the garbage disposal less often to conserve water](#)

We usually let the water run while we dispose of food down the dishwasher. Use it only when necessary.

[Fill the sink with water to pre-rinse dishes before putting them in the dishwasher](#)

This is a great way to conserve water. You are not only saving water by eliminating the process of rinsing dishes before you place them in the dishwasher but also reducing the load on your dishwasher (and perhaps preventing dishes from being washed again).