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Nebraska Cooperative Extension EC89-731

Water Conservation Checklist for The Home

save water . . .
save energy . . .
save money!

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Water Conservation Checklist for The Home

Test Yourself . . . Using Your Water Conservation Checklist

The availability of water, now and in the future, should be a concern of everyone. In most areas of the country, and most of the time, water has been readily available and we seldom give water a second thought. The situation is changing. There are constantly new demands on our water supply. Sometimes that supply may be less than at other times because of climatic conditions, a disaster, or just a breakdown in the water system.

Conserving water will also conserve other resources—energy and money. It costs money to pump water and make it available in our homes, for irrigation, and for business and industrial uses. Energy is required to pump, move, and to purify water. Both energy and money are required to heat water—whether it is the water we heat and use, or the water we heat and waste through poor management practices.

By becoming more aware of your water use habits—both old and new—you can reduce water use (consumption), eliminate waste, and save energy and money.

How much water do you use in a day? A gallon? Do you use 25, 50, or even 100 or more gallons? Few people know how much they use. Studies show wide variation in the amount of water used by rural and urban households. The range was from 66 to 118 gallons per person per day with urban households using the larger amounts.

Imagine what it would be like to turn on the tap and not get at least a drop of water. People in some parts of the country know this does happen. They are learning how to conserve water. They know that water is a limited resource. Water shortages are now a local or regional problem. Some day they may be a national problem. It is wise to learn now how to conserve water.

This checklist is designed to help you see how effectively you are using water, and to alert you to ways to save. Some actions suggested are more severe than others and would need to be implemented only in an emergency situation—and are indicated as such.

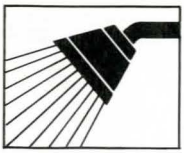
As you read this list, check the steps you have already taken to conserve water. Note what you still need to do to become a better manager of water resources. Concentrate on the big water uses first.

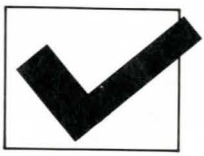
Have Done	Will Do	Plumbing System
☐	☐	Inspect the plumbing system to see there are no leaks.
☐	☐	Install flow control devices in showers.
☐	☐	Or, limit the amount of shower water by the way you use the controls for the hot and cold water faucets, or a mixer faucet.
☐	☐	Turn off all water if you are going to be away from home on a vacation or trip. This keeps children from turning on outside faucets while you are away.
☐	☐	Check to see how often your home water softening equipment regenerates and backwashes. It can use as much as 100 gallons of water each time it does this. You may want to cut down on the use of such equipment. Reserve softened water for kitchen use, bathing, and laundry. Use unsoftened water for all other purposes. (This may require a bypass line but this is advisable under any circumstances).
☐	☐	Insulate hot water pipes. Having to clear the "hot" line of cooled water is wasteful.
☐	☐	Check all faucets, inside and out, for drips. Make repairs promptly. These problems get worse—never better.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Teach children to turn water faucets off quickly and tightly after each use.
☐	☐	A toilet leak can waste lots of water. Put a small amount of food coloring into the tank. If the color trickles into the bowl, there is a leak and repairs are needed.
☐	☐	Water required to flush some toilets can be reduced. Experiment by placing a quart plastic (not glass) bottle filled with water in the flush tank to save 1 quart of water per flush. (Don't use a brick to fill space in your toilet flush tank. Particles from the brick could damage the valve).
☐	☐	Or, you can adjust the float level of the toilet to reduce the amount of water necessary to flush the toilet. Do this carefully to avoid damaging the system. Try only a slight adjustment.
☐	☐	Never use the toilet as a trash basket for facial tissues, etc. Each flush uses 5 to 7 gallons of water. Items carelessly thrown in could clog the system and adds to the sewage disposal problems.
☐	☐	**Emergency Situations:** When the toilet needs flushing use "gray water" saved from cleaning, bathing, etc. Put the water in toilet bowl—not the flush tank. If the system loses pressure, "gray water" if placed in the tank could back-siphon and get into the system and contaminate the drinking water.

Laundry

☐	☐	Wait until you have a full load before washing items, or use a lower water level setting.
☐	☐	Save handwashing jobs and do several items at one time. Example: wash a week's supply of hosiery rather than daily.





Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Check garments to make sure they need washing. Don't wash clothes more often than necessary.
☐	☐	Encourage children to change into play clothes after school so that school and play clothes can be worn several times.
☐	☐	**Emergency Situations:** Use the "gray water" that siphons from your washing machine into a laundry tub or other container for cleaning, to flush the toilet, or water plants. (See directions for using "gray water" on plants). Use the "gray water" as soon as possible. Do not store longer than 24 hours.

Personal Care

☐	☐	Urge family members to take showers instead of tub baths. Showers—especially those fitted with flow restrictors or low-volume heads—usually use less water than a bath. Plug the tub during a shower and compare the water used with that for a bath. Limit shower time to 2 minutes or less.
☐	☐	Cut down on the number of showers taken. Replace some of them with sponge baths using a small amount of water in a basin.
☐	☐	Seek other ways to relax besides staying in the shower for long periods of time.
☐	☐	Turn off shower water while you apply soap to body, or lather hair and massage scalp.
☐	☐	Turn off water while you shave, brush teeth, etc.
☐	☐	**Emergency Situation:** Close bathtub drain during shower so that the water stays in the tub. Use this to flush the toilet or water outdoor plants.

Food Preparation

☐	☐	Use a pan of water when peeling and cleaning vegetables and fruits rather than letting the sink tap run.
☐	☐	To get warm water, turn hot water on first; then add cold water as needed. You get warm water quicker this way and save water, too.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Limit use of a garbage disposal. Save food scraps and run the disposal once to conserve water. You can use the disposal even less by saving food scraps for a compost pile.
☐	☐	Use the smallest amount of water necessary to cook foods such as frozen vegetables and stews. You'll preserve nutrients as well as save water.
☐	☐	A tight-fitting lid on a pan saves water from boiling away and also cooks food faster, thereby using less energy.
☐	☐	Plan more one-dish meals in which vegetables are cooked or baked without adding water.
☐	☐	Use a tea kettle or covered pan to heat water and avoid loss of water through evaporation.
☐	☐	Time foods during the cooking process to avoid over cooking and loss of liquids through evaporation.
☐	☐	Select the proper size pans for cooking. Large pans require more cooking water.
☐	☐	Use a pressure cooker to save water, energy, and time.
☐	☐	A bottle of drinking water kept cold in your refrigerator saves running the tap to get cold water.
☐	☐	Save leftover vegetable juices for soups, cooking raw or frozen vegetables, stews, and making gravy. Refrigerate and use juices within a day or two.
☐	☐	Using syrups and juices from canned goods saves water and makes foods taste better. Use leftover fruit juices for drinking and making gelatin salads.
☐	☐	**Food Preparation Emergency Situation:** If a water shortage seems likely, store water in clean plastic or glass jugs with tight-fitting lids. Keep in the refrigerator and use sparingly.

Meal Service

☐	☐	Chill water in bottles in the refrigerator to avoid running excess water from the lines to get cold water for meals. Shake bottle before serving to incorporate air in the water so that it doesn't taste flat.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Put drinking water on the table only if people really drink it.

Dishwashing

☐	☐	Cut down on the number of utensils used in food preparation, and on the plates and glassware used with meals. This will save on dishwashing water used to clean them.
☐	☐	Wash only full loads of dishes in dishwasher. A dishwasher uses about 9 to 13 gallons of water per cycle.
☐	☐	Avoid unnecessary rinsing of dishes that go into the dishwasher for immediate washing. Scrape if necessary.
☐	☐	When washing dishes by hand, use one pan of soapy water for washing and a second pan of hot water for rinsing. Rinsing in a pan requires less water than rinsing under a running faucet.

Household Cleaning

☐	☐	Wipe up small spills as they occur to avoid frequent mopping of floors.
☐	☐	Regularly vacuum carpets and rugs so you won't need to shampoo them as often. There is less danger of permanent stains when you take care of spots as they occur.
☐	☐	"Collect" household cleaning chores. Do them together to save water. Clean the more lightly soiled surfaces first—the mirrors, walls, woodwork, and then floors.

House Plants

☐	☐	Use rinse water—"gray water"—saved from bathing or clothes washing to water indoor plants. Do not use soapy water on indoor plants. It could damage them.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Water indoor plants only when needed. Too much water can damage plants.

Outside the Home

☐	☐	Car washing, if you use the hose down method, can use a lot of water. You may have to lower your standards and wash the car less often.
☐	☐	Use a bucket of warm sudsy water to remove soil from the car. Hose down only as a final rinse.
☐	☐	Take advantage of a soft summer rain to wash your car. Get out there with soap and a sponge! Children will enjoy this.
☐	☐	If water supply permits use of an outdoor pool, cover the pool when it's not being used to prevent evaporation.
☐	☐	Clean the swimming pool filter often. Then you won't have to replace the water as often.
☐	☐	Use a broom, not the hose, to "sweep" the garage, the sidewalks, and the driveway.

Garden and Lawn

☐	☐	Vegetables requiring more water should be grouped together in the garden to make maximum use of water applications.
☐	☐	"Mulch" shrubs and other plants to retain moisture in the soil longer. Spread leaves, lawn clippings, chopped bark or cobs, or plastic around the plants. Mulching also controls weeds that compete with garden plants for water. Mulches should permit water to soak into the soil.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Try "trickle" or "drip" irrigation systems in outdoor gardens. These methods use 25 to 50 percent less water than hose or sprinkler methods. The tube for the trickle system has many tiny holes to water closely spaced plants. The drip system tubing contains holes or openings at strategic places for tomatoes and other plants that are more widely spaced.
☐	☐	If you are using a garden hose or sprinkler, water the garden thoroughly, but less frequently. Don't let water run down driveway or street.
☐	☐	Lawns should be watered during hours when the water system experiences the least demand—usually avoid watering when windy or in heat of day—and keep track of the time. Set an alarm clock or timer as a reminder. A sprinkler left on overtime in one spot wastes water.
☐	☐	Less frequent but heavier lawn watering encourages a deeper root system to withstand dry weather better.
☐	☐	**Emergency Situation:** If water is rationed or otherwise restricted, lawns should receive the lowest priority for outside watering. Water trees and shrubs which die more quickly without it and are more expensive to replace.
☐	☐	Soapy water that comes from soap you can use on your skin is OK for outdoor plants. Do not use water with bleach or borax compound in it on plants. It could damage them. Rinse water from laundry can be used on outdoor or indoor plants.
		Be Water Conscious When You Make Purchase Decisions . . .
☐	☐	**When Selecting New Equipment:** Consider low-volume shower heads.
☐	☐	Look at water requirements when selecting a dishwasher.
☐	☐	Consider water requirements when buying a clothes washer, and/or a choice of water levels. Consider a suds-saver to reuse water.
☐	☐	Select water-saving model toilets. In areas where severe water problems exist, bioconversion toilets may be the answer.

Have Done	Will Do	
☐	☐	Smaller than standard bath tubs may meet your need and saves water.
☐	☐	Select a water heater sized for family needs, and insulated to prevent heat loss.
☐	☐	Buy clothing and household items that do not require separate washing.
☐	☐	Select the most effective type of watering hose for your needs.
☐	☐	**When Building or Remodeling:** Group bathrooms, laundry, and kitchen in one general area to avoid long plumbing lines thus reducing amount of water run to get hot water.
☐	☐	Locate water heater near area where hottest water is needed. That is usually in the kitchen/laundry area.
☐	☐	If remodeling or building, locate the hot water heater as close as possible to bathroom, kitchen, and laundry areas. The closer to the faucet the heater is, less water has to be run through pipes. For this reason, it's sometimes better to have two smaller water heaters: one located in the kitchen area; and, one in the bathroom area, when the distances between the two areas are great.
☐	☐	Plan landscaping and gardening to minimize watering requirements.

List Water Conserving Practices You Plan To Use

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For more information on ways to conserve water, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service, usually listed in your telephone directory under county government offices. Or, write to the Cooperative Extension Service at your state land grant university or college.

This publication was prepared and revised by the following Extension Service–USDA specialists:

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