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30 smart ways to save on your summer water bill; [Chicago Final Edition]

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Author(s): Cathy Frisinger, Knight Ridder/Tribune Newspapers

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Abstract (Document Summary)

1. Wash dishes in the dishwasher, rather than by hand. "When people wash dishes by hand, they tend to leave the faucet on all the time. With a machine, water isn't running all the time," says [Ann Vickers], author of "The Handbook of Water Use and Conservation." Hand washing dinner dishes could easily use 15 to 26 gallons of water; a conventional dishwasher uses 10-14 gallons; a new, energy-efficient dishwasher uses 4-7 gallons per load.

Full Text (1297 words)

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Last summer's dry spell--with its watering bans and crispy brown lawns--helped to remind many of us that water is a precious commodity.

Weather patterns aside, long-term water conservation is essential, says Ann Vickers, author of "The Handbook of Water Use and Conservation," because of our ever-increasing population.

Here are 30 ways that you can help conserve water--and money on your utility bills:

Kitchen

1. Wash dishes in the dishwasher, rather than by hand. "When people wash dishes by hand, they tend to leave the faucet on all the time. With a machine, water isn't running all the time," says Ann Vickers, author of "The Handbook of Water Use and Conservation." Hand washing dinner dishes could easily use 15 to 26 gallons of water; a conventional dishwasher uses 10-14 gallons; a new, energy-efficient dishwasher uses 4-7 gallons per load.

2. Scrape dishes rather than rinsing them.

3. Wait till the dishwasher is full before turning it on.

4. Install an aerator on your kitchen sink. These inexpensive items (about \$5 to \$10) mix air into the water, reducing flow while maintaining pressure. Placing aerators on kitchen and bathroom sinks typically reduces water usage by about 4 percent, the American Water Works Association says on its Web site.

5. Keep a container of water in the refrigerator rather than running the faucet and waiting for the water to get cold.

6. Rinse vegetables in a pan partially filled with water rather than under running water, and reuse the water for watering plants.

7. Defrost food in the refrigerator or microwave rather than running water over it.

8. Compost food scraps when possible (no animal products) rather than running the disposal.

Laundry

9. Replace an old clothes washer with an Energy Star washer. Energy Star is an Environmental Protection Agency designation for appliances that save significant energy. Washers are not currently required to be water-stingy to get an Energy Star designation, but, nevertheless, most Energy Star washers do use 35 to 50 percent less water than other washers. When

shopping for a washing machine, look for one with a low water factor. After Jan. 1, 2007, water savings will be mandatory for a washer to receive the Energy Star designation.

10. In general, run the clothes washer only when it is full. If you must do a smaller load, use the settings to reduce the water level.

Bathroom

11. Take a shower of no more than five minutes rather than a bath.

12. Install a water-efficient shower head. "Replace an existing shower head if a 1-gallon bucket placed under the flow takes less than 20 seconds to fill," advises the American Water Works Association.

13. Do not leave the faucet running while brushing teeth or shaving. With this simple change in behavior, an individual can save 1,200 gallons per year, according to the Tarrant Regional Water District.

14. Do not use the toilet as a wastebasket.

15. Replace an old toilet (1993 or earlier model) with a new, low-flow toilet. Installing a more efficient model will save the typical household from 8,000 to 21,000 gallons of water a year, according to the AWWA. If you can't replace an old toilet, reduce the amount of water it uses by placing a plastic bottle filled with water in the tank to displace water. Do not put a brick in the tank.

16. Twenty percent of all toilets leak, according to the AWWA. Here's an easy way to check for a leak in the tank: Place a few drops of food dye in the tank; check the bowl 15 minutes later; if there's color in the bowl, there's a leak. Replacing the flapper will often fix the problem.

Outdoors

17. Water your lawn and garden only when they need it. Most lawns receive twice as much water as they need, according to the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. In addition to being a major waste of water, daily watering causes shallow root growth, which is bad for plants. Water 1 inch every five to seven days in the summer and every 15 to 20 days in winter, advises the Tarrant County (Texas) Regional Water District.

18. Water lawns early in the morning. Do not water on windy days to avoid water loss to evaporation.

19. Water in several short sessions rather than one long one to allow for better absorption of the water and to prevent runoff.

20. Adjust an automatic sprinkler system at least once a month, or, better yet, set it by hand each time you use it. Even better, do not install an automatic sprinkler system if you don't already have one. Homes that have a sprinkler system use 35 percent more water, according to the AWWA. They're too easy to use, says Vickers. "People set it, and forget it."

21. Make sure sprinkler heads are working correctly and not watering the driveway or street.

22. Use drip irrigation to water shrubs, and vegetable and flower gardens. Much less water is lost to evaporation with drip systems than spray systems.

23. Mulch gardens and shrubs. (It's good for the plants, as well as being a water saver.)

24. Reduce the size of your lawn, and xeriscape other portions of your yard, using plants that prosper with very little water. In addition to conserving resources, xeriscapes are low-maintenance (they conserve your resources too.) If this is too drastic for you, create water zones. Have a cluster of low-water plants and reduce the water to that area accordingly.

25. Aerate clay soils to improve water retention and prevent runoff.

26. Cover pools and spas when not in use. A pool left uncovered loses about 1,000 gallons a month to evaporation, says the AWWA.

27. Thinking about installing an artificial pond or fountain? Don't do it, says Vickers. Even though these features are usually designed to recirculate water, they lose large quantities of water to evaporation.

28. Use a broom rather than a hose to clean sidewalks and driveways.

Miscellaneous

29. Take your car to a carwash to be cleaned rather than washing it in your driveway. The detergents you use to wash your car at home end up in the storm drains and eventually local creeks, where they are an ecohazard. Commercial washes are required to send waste water through the sanitary sewer system.

30. Monitor your water meter, and check your household, including pools, spas and outdoor spigots, for leaks. Here's an easy way to determine if you have any leaks: When you are going to be leaving your home for a day or two, turn off all appliances that would use water, such as icemakers or humidifiers. Note the reading on your water meter and check it when you return. If it's changed, there's a leak somewhere.

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How dry they are

South Australia proudly proclaims itself to be "the driest state on the driest inhabited continent on the planet," on the Web site www.sawater.com.au.

The South Australia government has imposed permanent water control measures on all businesses and individuals. For instance, sprinkler systems cannot be used between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., and washing your car with a regular hose is forever banned.

And there's a "new lawn permit form" on the Web site, that asks, among other things, for the date you intend to lay/seed your new lawn. Think about that the next time you contemplate killing off your bluegrass/fescue and starting over.

-- Cathy Frisinger

[Illustration]

PHOTO GRAPHIC; Caption: PHOTO: Homes with automatic sprinklers use 35 percent more water, according to studies. Tribune file photo. GRAPHIC (color): Drops of reality (Average per capita daily indoor water use in single-family homes) PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL DAILY USE Toilets 26.7% Clothes washer 21.7 Shower 16.8 Faucets 15.7 Leaks 13.7 Bathtub 1.7 Dishwasher 1.4 Source: www.awwa.org Tribune photo illustration

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