

Average Water Use

EM 8357 • Reprinted June 1990



National averages show that a typical household of four uses water as follows:

Use	Gallons per day
Dishwashing	15
Cooking, drinking	12
Laundry	35
Bathing	80
Bathroom sink	8
Toilet	100
Utility sink	5
Total family use	255 gal (34.09 ft³)

How to reduce water use

Changing household practices can reduce water use without posing a threat to family health or comfort. Reduce the number of toilet flushes each day or install water displacement devices in the toilet tank; brush teeth dry or use water only to rinse the brush; keep a covered container of drinking water in the refrigerator rather than running the tap until water is cold.

Bathing

A major source of excess water use is in the shower. People are inclined to shower more frequently than necessary and to use the shower as a place to relax. Showering saves water only when you limit the time; 2 minutes or less is sufficient to get clean. A water-saving way to shower is to get wet, turn off the water, lather up, wash, then turn the water

back on to rinse. You can also shampoo your hair in this manner. As a general rule, only certain body parts—underarms, pubic areas, feet, hands, and face—require daily washing.

A shower can use from 5 to 15 gallons of water per minute. You can reduce this to 3 gallons by installing a low-flow shower head or shower insert. If the shower is in the tub, close the drain so all the water stays in the tub. This water can be used later to flush the toilet. A bathtub holds 25 to 30 gallons when full—use as little as possible.

We don't need to bathe as often as most of us do—2 or 3 times a week is adequate, and you can maintain personal cleanliness with sponge baths. Families can share showers or baths to conserve water, and activities such as massage, stretching exercises, or using a quiet place to contemplate can replace the shower as a place of relaxation and retreat.

The toilet

The toilet is a major water user. Greatest savings can be achieved by pouring a bucket of "gray water," salvaged from the bathtub or sink, into the toilet bowl instead of using water from the toilet tank. Depending on size, toilet flushing uses from 5 to 7 gallons per flush. It is not necessary to flush after every use. Reduce odor by adding a little vinegar, liquid detergent, or chlorine bleach to the bowl.

Put plastic bottles filled with water in the toilet tank to cut down on the water used if "gray water" is not reused for flushing. Place 1-quart bottles in positions that do not inter-

fere with toilet operation. You can try using glass bottles of various shapes and sizes, but beware of glass breakage, which could cause problems in the pipes. Plastic bottles are safer. It is also possible to bend the metal rod to lower the position of the float ball in the toilet tank. The float ball cuts off water when it floats at top position.

A toilet requires a certain amount of water to flush properly, so experiment to find the correct water level. Since plastic bottles hold a measured amount of water, they can be used to determine the amount of water needed (turn off the water valve below the toilet before removing the bottles, so the water level will not change while the float rod is being bent). Use both hands to bend the rod gently.

Sinks are obvious places to catch water rather than letting it go down the drain. To save water, place a bowl or basin under the faucet. If the water is clean, use it for watering houseplants. If the water contains soap, detergent, or other contaminants, store it in a bucket for toilet flushing.

Another way to save is to reduce the amount of water coming into the house by adjusting the pressure-reducing valves installed as part of the plumbing system. These are usually located at the house control shut-off valve. Pressure can be lowered as long as water-using fixtures continue to operate efficiently.

Reviewed by Mary Ann Sward, Extension housing specialist, Oregon State University.



Common sense

Common sense use of faucets will reduce water consumption. Turning water off instead of leaving it running will save many gallons. For example, you can save:

- about 10 gallons while brushing your teeth,
- about 19 gallons while shaving,
- about 25 gallons while washing dishes (by using a rinse pan), and
- about 1 gallon by filling the basin to wash your hands.

Repair leaks

Repair leaky faucets and toilets. Many gallons of water are wasted by very small leaks.



Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O.E. Smith, director. This publication was produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.

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