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# Ways to save water

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Each person in the Sacramento region uses, on average, 287 gallons of water each day at home, the heaviest water consumption of any metropolitan region in the state.

Here are some tips for cutting back.

## Get a water audit

Most of the region's 22 water suppliers offer free water audits to help their customers figure out how to save water. Call the customer service number on your water bill or the Regional Water Authority's conservation hotline – (888) 987-8477 – to make an appointment.

A consultant will test and adjust sprinkler systems, check for leaks throughout the property and point out any water-guzzling appliances that ought to be replaced.

## Save big in the yard

Keeping the landscape green can easily account for three-quarters of a home's water usage in the Sacramento region. To conserve, experts say, start by fixing any leaks, then consider the following steps:

### Stop overwatering

Many lawns are watered inefficiently. This problem can be tricky to diagnose, but an indicator is water running onto the sidewalk when the sprinklers are on – a sign that the turf is saturated. It's a common problem for lawns with even a slight slope, or areas where the soil absorbs water slowly.

The fix: Instead of watering nonstop for, say, 20 minutes, set sprinklers for three bursts of 5 minutes, with a break of a half-hour or more to let the water soak in. A change like this costs nothing, cuts usage by 25 percent and, in many cases, gives the lawn as much or more useful water.

A water auditor or landscaping expert can suggest changes and demonstrate how to reprogram irrigation timers. Some utilities offer rebates to upgrade sprinkler controllers and other parts of the system as well.

### Water plants, not air and asphalt

Lawns: As much as 30 percent of the water shot from standard sprinklers that spray small droplets is lost in flight, particularly on hot or windy days. "Rotary" sprinklers – about \$10 each – shoot water in streams, making it less likely to evaporate or be blown off course.

Landscape plants: Drip systems generally deliver water more efficiently to plant roots than sprinklers or hand watering. Savings are substantial but vary widely. Covering bare earth with mulch is another simple way to keep the soil moist with less water.

### **Rethink grass**

A lawn demands more water per square foot (about 35 gallons a year) than most any other type of landscaping. But that doesn't mean it all has to go. Designers recommend taking a look at how much lawn the home needs for kids, pets, entertaining and so on. If there's excess turf, think about pulling it out.

What replaces it doesn't have to be cactus and rocks. Nurseries offer a huge range of landscape plants, native and exotic, that need less water than grass.

This year, the city of Roseville is testing the region's first "cash for grass" program – paying homeowners \$1 for every square foot of lawn ripped out. The city says demand far exceeds the \$30,000 allocated to the program. If it proves cost-effective, look for other water utilities to adopt similar programs.

### **Inside the home**

While low-flush toilets and low-flow shower heads have been standard in new California homes for years, there's still huge potential for indoor water savings – as much as 40 percent, according to a 2003 study by the Pacific Institute, an Oakland think tank – mainly by replacing inefficient toilets, shower heads and washing machines.

#### **Toilets**

Statewide, toilets use about a third of California's in-home water. Old models can use 6 to 7 gallons per flush. The "ultra-low-flush" toilets installed in new homes since about 1994 use 1.6 gallons, while newer designs use even less. "Dual-flush" toilets now available flush either 0.8 gallons or 1.6 gallons, depending on the size of the job.

Most of the Sacramento region's water utilities offer \$125 rebates for 1.6 gallon-per-flush toilets, and \$175 for models using 1.2 gallons or less.

#### **Shower heads**

Federal standards since 1994 have set the maximum flow for a shower head at 2.5 gallons per minute. Pre-1980 models can exceed 5 gallons per minute. Even though people tend to take slightly longer showers under low-flow heads, replacing a 5-gallon-per-minute head will still save water – on average about 17 gallons per shower, according to the Pacific Institute study. More efficient showers also require less hot water, cutting energy bills.

#### **Washing machines**

New washing machines tend to be among the more expensive ways to cut water use, but the long-term water and energy savings are substantial.

Many older models use more than 40 gallons a load. Today's energy-efficient models can do the same amount of laundry with 50 percent to 75 percent less water. As with showers, reducing the use of hot water also cuts energy bills.

Check with your water utility for information on rebate programs.

Sources: Don Smith, city of Folsom; Lisa Maddaus, Regional Water Authority; Mike Connor, Irrigation Consultation and Evaluation; the Pacific Institute; Cheryl Buckwalter, Landscape Liaisons; John Gillespie, Sprinkler Service and Supply; Don Franklin, Hunter Industries

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