

How to avoid a drought - Facts and figures on water usage

We all moan about the weather, it is one of our main topics of conversation. One of the biggest concerns at the moment is the lack of rainfall over the past few years. It will be ironic if you are reading this on a day when it is actually raining cats and dogs outside.

Whilst Devon is not currently subject to the drought orders affecting large parts of the South East we all need to be aware of the need to conserve water to make sure we can avoid a similar situation here. Water Conservation is everyone's business – we can all help to save more water.

The amount of water we use has been steadily increasing since the 70's when the average water consumption was 110 litres (24 gallons) per person per day. Today that figure has risen to around 157 litres (34 gallons) per person per day. In comparison developing countries only use 20 litres!"

With forecasters predicting more extremes of weather, an increasing local population and the west country an ever more popular tourist destination, our water suppliers are naturally keen to encourage water efficiency.

We all waste water.... just think about how long the tap is left running each time you clean your teeth or use a hosepipe when you wash your car. By making a few small changes to your habits, you can help save water, not by going short or without, but by cutting out waste and unnecessary use.

The areas in which we use large amounts of water

- 1/3 of household water is used to flush the toilet
- Bath 80 litres (16 buckets)
- 5 minute shower (not power shower) 35 litres (7 buckets)
- Brushing teeth with tap running 6 litres/min (1.2 buckets)
- Brushing teeth with tap off 1 litre (0.2 buckets)
- Dripping tap 140 litres/week (28 buckets)
- Washing machine 65 litres (13 buckets)
- Dishwasher 20 litres (4 buckets)
- Washing car with bucket 10 litres (2 buckets)
- Hosepipe/sprinkler 540 litres/hour (108 buckets)

Figures based on bucket with 5 litres capacity

Top Tips for preserving water in the garden

- Collect rain water in a water butt
- Check the weather forecast before watering the garden – it might rain tomorrow
- Even in the hottest weather a lawn only need to be watered once a week
- Most trees and shrubs only need watering until they are established
- Use a watering can as it is easier to make sure you don't over water the garden
- Water late at night or early in the morning to avoid water evaporating in the sun
- Let the grass grow longer in a dry period it will stay greener than a closely mown lawn
- Longer grass also encourages longer roots which in turn slow down evaporation
- You should have a water meter installed before you can use a sprinkler
- Spiking your lawn will help soak water

Top Tips for preserving water in the house

- Fitting a Save-a-flush (a bag of harmless crystals) in your toilet cistern can save up to 1 litre per flush. That's a saving of nearly 2,000 litres per person per year.*
- Installing a Hippo (designed to work in toilet cisterns with a 9 litre flush or greater) could save up to 5,000 litres per person per year.*

- Have a refreshing shower instead of a bath - this can save over 300 litres of water a week. Be careful though - a power shower can use more water than a bath!
- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth. Brushing your teeth with the tap running wastes 6 litres per minute.
- Fix leaking taps. A dripping tap can waste up to 140 litres a week.
- When buying a new dishwasher, choose one that is energy efficient as this saves on water and electricity. Machines with an 'A' rating are most economical.
- Wait for a full load before using the washing machine - a full load uses less water than 2 half loads.
- Cool water in the fridge means you don't have to run the tap for ages to get a cold drink.
- Only fill the kettle with enough water for your needs, this will reduce your fuel bills too.
- When washing vegetables or rinsing dishes, avoid waste by using a bowl of water rather than placing them under a running tap. You could save 17,000 litres of water per year, enough to make 80,000 cups of tea.
- Lag your pipes and leave your heating on a low setting when you are out to avoid bursts in cold weather.
- If you have a water meter, check for leaks by turning off the water and taking two readings several minutes apart. If the readings are different there may be a leak.
- Use a bucket and sponge to clean the car instead of a power spray.

* These are often available free from water suppliers, however see below

- If your W.C. was installed before 1991 it will be 9 litres in volume or more. This type of W.C. will work well with a Hippo fitted which reduces the flush volume by (approx.) 2.5 litres.
- If your W.C. was installed from 1992 to 2001 it will be 7.5 litres in volume and is suitable for the Save-a-Flush device (also known as a HOG). This reduces the flush volume by 1 litre.
- If your W.C. has been installed more recently it will be 6 litres in volume (the current standard) and should not be reduced further.

Finally if you spot an external leak report it to your water supplier. Don't just assume someone else has.