

Water Conservation

An excerpt from

THE PREPPER'S
WATER
SURVIVAL

Daisy Luther

COPYRIGHT ULYSSES PRESS

We've talked about doing without water. We've talked about unsafe water. We've talked about storing it, testing it, purifying it, and collecting it. But one thing that people don't always stop to consider is exactly how much water they use in a day.

If you have to go to the effort of obtaining it, purifying it, getting it into your house, and heating it, you don't want to waste a drop. There's no better way to become an expert at conservation than to haul buckets of water for your personal use. This I know from arm-aching experience.

Everyone in the preparedness realm knows the adage about 1 gallon per person per day, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. It doesn't include the vast amount of water we customarily use for hygiene purposes. The average American goes through at least 100 gallons of water per day. We take long, hot showers. We run the tap when we brush our teeth. We think nothing of running the dishwasher or throwing a load of laundry into the washing machine each day.

Clearly, in an off-grid scenario, many of those activities wouldn't be possible. In a situation where water doesn't flow from the taps, you'll be responsible for hauling it into the house by the bucketful. If you want hot water, you'll have to use an off-grid method to heat it. If you're lucky, you'll have a water tank warmed by the sun. If you aren't so lucky, you'll be heating it over a fire.

There's also the possibility of a slightly different situation. Perhaps your water supply is rationed and limited by the

public utility companies due to the terrible drought sweeping most of the United States. You're still going to want clean clothes, clean dishes, and a clean body. You'll want to be able to flush your toilet without using half of your day's "ration" of water.

No matter why your water supply is limited, you'll want to conserve that precious fluid.

If You Still Have Running Water

You may still wish to conserve when the luxury of running water is available. Perhaps, as mentioned above, water has been rationed by your local utility company. Your well might be low, or maybe you just want to be environmentally responsible and reduce your usage.

rReduce the amount of water per flush. Use a brick, a filled plastic bottle, or a float booster to fill space in the back of the toilet tank. This allows the tank to fill with a smaller amount of water during each flush.

rDon't flush every time. Speaking of flushing, you may have heard the rhyme, "If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown, flush it down."

rReuse water that would normally go to waste. Devise a graywater catchment system for your shower,

washing machine, and kitchen. This water can be used for flushing, watering plants, and cleaning.

rTake shorter showers. Try to reduce your showers to five minutes. This can save up to 1,000 gallons per month! If you can't handle a five-minute shower, just try to make them a little quicker. For every two minutes you shorten your shower time, you can save approximately 150 to 200 gallons per month. So if you can't quite handle a five-minute shower, you can still reduce your usage dramatically. For example, if your usual shower is 20 minutes and you reduce it to 10 minutes, you could still save up to 1,000 gallons of water per month from your previous usage. **rUpgrade your shower head.** Install a water-saving shower head. A low-flow shower head uses 2 gallons of water per minute, whereas a conventional shower head uses 3.5 to 4 gallons of water per minute. This can result in a savings of more than 5,000 gallons of water per year, per person. So, for that family of four, this works out to a whopping 20,000 gallons of water from a simple change of hardware.

rWhen you have a shower, plug the tub. Use the water you collect for hand-washing laundry. (See the next suggestion!)

rHandwash some of your laundry. For delicate items or things that are lightly soiled, handwashing can save a lot of water, particularly if you use water that would have gone down the drain otherwise.

rIf you do use a dishwasher, run it only when it's completely full. This can save you 1,000 gallons per month, since you'll most likely be skipping a day between loads.

rWash your dishes by hand. Fill your sink with soapy water. You'll be using a fraction of the water it takes to run your dishwasher. (Bonus: You get to save on electricity, too!)

rRun a basin of rinse water. Instead of running water over each dish to rinse, fill one side of the sink or a basin with rinse water containing a splash of white vinegar. When washing your hands, dip them in a basin of water, lather up, then rinse under running water. Running water uses up to 4 gallons per minute.

rDon't be wasteful! If you drop a tray of ice cubes, pop them into a pet dish or into your potted plants.

rUpgrade all of your faucets. Inexpensive aerators with flow restrictors greatly reduce the flow of water from your taps.

- rUse a nozzle on your hose.** Spray water only where you want it by placing a nozzle on your hose that allows you to direct the flow onto your plants or into the dog's dish, instead of spraying it uselessly as you walk across the lawn to the garden.
- rRepair leaky faucets.** The rate of one drip per second adds up to 5 gallons per day literally down the drain. Over the course of a year, that is nearly 2,000 gallons, a tiny drip at a time.
- rCheck your toilet for leaks.** It isn't just your faucet that might be dripping away thousands of gallons of water per year. If your toilet is leaking you might never even notice it. Here's how to check: Put some food coloring in the tank. Don't flush. Just walk away for 30 minutes. When you come back, there should be no trace of color in the toilet bowl. If there is some color, you have a leak. Good news: most replacement parts to fix this are very inexpensive.
- rStop using the garbage disposal.** You use a LOT of water running the disposal. Make better use of those food scraps by taking them out to the compost pile.
- rShop wisely.** If you are buying new appliances and fixtures for your home, opt for those that use water more efficiently, like front-loading washing machines and low-flow toilets.

rReuse nutrient-rich “dirty water.” When you clean out your fish tank, reserve the water for your garden. Your veggies will love the nutrient boost!

rDon’t waste the water you run waiting for hot water. One of the biggest water wasters is something we ALL do: we run the taps for a minute, waiting for the flow to get warm. Collect that water! You can use it for cleaning, for the pets, for watering plants, for making tea, or for cooking. Just don’t let it go down the drain.

rSame with cold water. Another water waste occurs when you run the taps to get cold water for drinking. For cold water on demand, store a pitcher of water in the refrigerator instead.

rDon’t run the water while you brush your teeth. You’re sending gallons down the drain. Only run the water when you need to rinse your toothbrush or the sink.

If You Don’t Have Running Water

Life without running water...ugh. Been there, done that, got a stain on my T-shirt. Luckily for me, it happened only briefly, due to power outages at the cabin. We were never completely without running water for more than a week. However, it prepared me because it helped me to understand just how much water we use and how much we rely on the faucets in our homes.

Do you remember the “No Running Water Drill” we did at the beginning of the book? You and your family did a test run

to see how much water you used over the weekend. Now, imagine that weekend was extended into a week, a month, or an indefinite amount of time. Take it a step further—you're no longer using stored water. You're collecting it, hauling it into your house, purifying it, and heating it. That's a lot of work, so you won't want to waste a drop.

Many of the suggestions above can be modified to extend the amount of water available in a situation during which you have no running water, but for real inspiration on living without running water, the best advice is to look to the past.

My Granny grew up in a house without running water. They got their water by manually pumping it from a well and lugging it to the house from the water source. Even in her eighties, she was very thrifty with her use of water. Hauling buckets during her childhood made a life-long impression. They took many of the following steps in order to lessen the workload. Here are some things that I learned at Granny's house:

Reuse cooking water. First of all, the water you used for cooking was already purified and made safe to consume. Don't waste it! If you have boiled pasta or vegetables, use this water for making soup. You will have retained some of the nutrients and flavor from the first thing you cooked in the water.

rUse a cup for shaving. This one is for the gentlemen.

When shaving, you can make lather in one cup, then rinse your razor in another cup between swipes.

rUse a glass of potable water for brushing your teeth. Make sure you use purified water for brushing your teeth. It's unlikely you'll get sick, since you're spitting the water out, but there's no point in risking illness, especially during an emergency situation during which resources are limited. Finish up with some mouthwash.

rUse a pitcher and bowl for washing up. When we lived in our cabin, I got a pretty, old-fashioned pitcher and bowl to put on a stand outside of the bathroom. Look to the old-fashioned ways for inspiration in solving problems.

rWash clothes in your bathtub. You can use soapy water from throughout the day for the first soak. (See page 159.)

rWash produce in a basin of water. Don't forget to wash your produce! Chemicals, feces, and all manner of bacteria could be lurking. Wash in a basin with food-safe soapy water, then rinse in another basin. Save the water for other uses, like flushing.

rHarvest rainwater for your garden. Make sure you have a way to collect water to keep your garden growing. You'll also need a way to dispense it. Many water barrels have a

gravity-fed spout to which you can attach a hose, sparing you from lugging buckets of water to your garden.

rUse an organic mulch in your garden. This will help to retain moisture, allowing you to water less frequently. This is a definite bonus if you are watering via buckets.

rWater early or late in the day. Don't water your plants during the hottest part of the day. Much of the water will evaporate. Instead, water early in the morning or at dusk.

A Few More Modern Tips

Landscape with plants that grow naturally in your area.

They should require little in the way of additional watering. On average, an astounding 60 percent of a household's water usage goes toward lawn and garden maintenance.

Grow organic. Chemical fertilizers can increase a plant's need for water.

To flush or not to flush? If you have a septic system, you can still flush waste (see page 164). This is such a step up in a down-grid situation.

However, you still have to do some things manually, since water won't be pumped to your toilet. Simply add water to the tank when it's

"brown" (remember the rhyme about flushing?). This is the perfect use for your graywater from dishes, showers, tooth-brushing, and laundry.

It's getting flushed so it doesn't matter if the water is gunky.
