



Saving Water at Home

Water is a precious resource, particularly on such a dry continent as Australia. Unfortunately, the large amount of water used by households has a significant environmental impact, so saving water means protecting the environment.

The Problem

The Thirsty Environment

All life requires water, so when we take water out of natural ecosystems, we take water from the environment. Reduced 'environmental flows' have had significant impacts on rivers systems such as the Snowy River and the Murray Darling River system.¹ Broken Hill will run out of surface water by August 2015 in this drought.¹¹

Free Flowing Rivers

Trapping water for urban use requires the construction of dams that flood valleys, destroying large areas of wilderness. Dams also disrupt the natural flow of rivers and change sediment deposition patterns. They can also prevent marine creatures from swimming up and downstream creating isolated ecosystems and disrupting breeding patterns.²

The construction and maintenance of dams is capital and energy intensive. As Australia's population continues to grow, we will need to invest in water efficiency or there will be a requirement for more dams and desalination plants.³

A Heavy Investment

Many capital cities have invested in desalination plants, which are very energy intensive.³ If desalination plants are not powered by renewable energy, significant environmental damage is done through mining and the emission of green house gases from fossil fuel burning.

The purification of drinking water requires energy, chemicals and significant infrastructure. Much of the water we use is over-purified - for example we don't need potable water for flushing toilets. In some areas water use can drain stored ground water in aquifers at an unsustainable rate.

The Solution

Water Saving At Home

Saving water at home is easy and in the long term can save you thousands of dollars.

If you have space you may want to consider installing a rain water tank. Even small rain water tanks can be used for washing your car or watering your garden. Have a look at the Australian Government's '[choosing the right rain water tank](#)' fact sheet for more information¹⁰.

Another important way to save water is to stop leaks as soon as they appear – a leaking tap can use as much as 2,000 litres a month. You can check for leaks in your house by having a look at your water metre before you go to bed – then checking it again in the morning (but make sure nobody uses water overnight!).

Most taps run more water than you need, so installing aerators will also help.

In The Bathroom

The shower is usually the largest consumer of water in any household. Installing a water-saving shower head and a timer in your shower can dramatically reduce your water use.

Second to the shower is the toilet as a big consumer of water in the household. Installing a dual flush toilet can save you thousands of litres per year. If this is too expensive you may want to consider putting a brick or in your toilet cistern to reduce the flush volume.

Old fashioned toilets may use as much as 12 litres per flush, while new dual flush toilet can use as little as 6 litres for a full flush and 3 litre for a half.

Did you know?

- An old-style single-flush toilet uses up to 12 litres of water per flush, while a standard dual flush toilet uses just a quarter of this on a half-flush.
- A standard showerhead may use up to 25 litres of water per minute whereas water-efficient showerhead might use as little as seven litres per minute.
- A leaking toilet can waste more than 16,000 litres of water a year.
- The bathroom accounts for around half of all water used inside the home.
- Household consumption per person is lowest in VIC (62kL) and highest in NT and WA (132kL)⁹.
- Washing your car can release up to 750mL sludge which can contain toxins such as surfactants, oil, dirt and heavy metals such as lead.
- The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Scheme is used to rate the water efficiency of appliances in Australia.
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You can check if your toilet is leaking by putting a small amount of food dye into your cistern, then looking to see if the dye leaks into the bowl.

In The Kitchen

The key culprit for water consumption in kitchens is the dishwasher. However, not all dishwashers are equal – some are markedly more water efficient than others. In Australia, the standard for rating the water efficiency of appliances is known as the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Scheme⁵.

According to the WELS rating, the most efficient dishwashers can use half as much water at the average dishwasher. To see how your appliances stack up, check the [WELS product database](#)⁵.

In The Laundry

Set your washing machine to an appropriate water level when washing clothes. You can also save energy by washing in cold water. Front loading washing machines use considerably less water than top loaders, and also require less energy and soap to do the same job. While the investment may be higher to begin with – in the long term they will save you money.

In The Garden

You can reduce the need to water your garden by planting drought tolerant native plants. Ask your local nursery for advice. When using your hose for cleaning or watering, use a hose-fitting with a trigger nozzle and water saving spray fitting⁸.

Washing Your Car

Washing your car in your driveway can be an environmental hazard. Car washes can release approximately 750ml of sludge that contains surfactants, oil, dirt and heavy metals such as lead.

Professional car washes recycle water and treat wastewater before discharge into the local sewer system. Discharge into the sewer system rather than into the stormwater drains means that wastewater is treated by the local sewerage treatment plant - which can remove toxins.

Washing your car in a 'Smart Approved WaterMark' can significantly reduce water use and emission of toxins into the environment. Accredited car washes use systems like water recycling and high pressure hoses to reduce water use. They also discharge wastewater into the sewer system where it gets treated by the local sewerage treatment plant. Keep an eye out for the five star water rating sign to see how the car wash stacks up.



References

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