

Water Conservation

My mother-in-law was an amazingly resourceful woman. As a farm wife on a dairy, she had to use every trick she could to save time and money when it came to managing the home. It was especially important for her to conserve water because that resource was critical to running the dairy. Her water-mindful actions around the farmhouse served these conservation practices well and many of them apply to both town and farm homes.

Conservation is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the careful use of natural resources (such as trees, oil, etc.) to prevent them from being lost or wasted. Water conservation practices are beneficial in a variety of ways.

Efficiently using water saves money. A significant amount of money is spent pumping, heating, and treating water that is used in the home. Reducing the amount of water used will save both energy and money by reducing your monthly water bills. If your home water supply comes from a well, you may be reducing costly repairs by taxing the well system less. Septic systems will have a prolonged life if you are reducing the amount of wastewater they handle.

Careful use of water reduces pollution. Lower amounts of wastewater entering the water treatment plants and septic systems often improves treatment processes and ultimately, allows for cleaner water to be discharged into the ground, river, and lakes. Use of outdoor water conservation and careful lawn care reduces pollution from the fertilizers and pesticides used in their care.

Wise use of water reduces the impact of drought. Drought causes an imbalance in water supply that effects crop production, water supplies (such as our household water), and water needs in the natural environment. There are areas suffering drought conditions here in Kansas, but are we doing all that we can to help curb the impact it has on our water reserves? Our laundry practices are but one area that we can focus on to help with water conservation. Being conservation minded when doing your laundry not only saves water, it also saves energy and money. The newer washing machine models have a variety of settings you can use to help use conserve water and energy. Choose the water level setting appropriate to your load size. Choose the appropriate water temperature for the wash cycle (the warmer the water, the more effective your cleaning is), but choose a cold rinse cycle to save money on heating more water. Of course, read your garment care labels to follow the recommended water temperatures for their proper care. If you are considering the purchase of a new washing machine, front loading machines generally conserve water more than top loading machines.

What other things can you do to conserve water? Some things will simply require you to change habits while others may require minimal financial investment. Making long-term changes to your habits and home water equipment can reduce water consumption by as much as 20 – 40%.

Here's a list to help you get started on conserving water in and around your home:

- ✓ Ensure all faucets, toilets, hoses, and pipes are functioning without leaks. As much as 20 gallons of water a day can be wasted due to a steadily dripping faucet.
- ✓ If you use public water, you can check for leaks by shutting off everything in your home that uses water. Once you have done this, check your water meter and wait at least an hour before you recheck your meter. If the reading changes, you know there is a leak somewhere in or around your home.
- ✓ Use water conserving fixtures and appliances such as aerators, low-flow showerheads, or low-flow toilets. Low-flow showerheads allow half the water flow that conventional showerheads allow. Use a showerhead that has a shut-off valve to turn the water off while you apply shampoo or soap.
- ✓ Since baths take more water, replace them with a quick shower. My kids like to stand under the water just because it warms them up (in the winter) or cools them off (in the summer.) Keeping a timer in the bathroom helps to reduce their shower time.
- ✓ Run less water for your shower to get it to heat up before you get in. You can put a bucket under the bathtub faucet to catch the cooler water that comes out first, then use the bucket to water plants.
- ✓ Turn off the water while you brush your teeth.
- ✓ Run the dishwasher with full loads only. The same applies to your clothes washing machine.
- ✓ Instead of running water from the tap until it gets cool, keep a bottle of water in the refrigerator for the cold drink of water needed after working outside.
- ✓ Be cautious that you don't overwater your outdoor plants or lawn. A slow, deep watering routine is better than a short and shallow sprinkling.
- ✓ Outside watering should be done during the cool parts of the day, preferably morning, so that you avoid excess evaporation.
- ✓ Don't use sprinklers and hoses for play.

Being aware of your water use practices is the first step to identifying where you can make changes to conserve this critical natural resource. You don't have to tackle everything on the list all at once. Rather, identify those things that you can readily change and incorporate those first. Then, as these new practices or changes become

habit, add additional actions into your water conservation efforts. If you have more questions about how you can conserve water around your home, feel free to contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!