

Conserving Water at Home

John M. Jemison, Jr., Extension water quality and soil specialist

Introduction

This bulletin is designed to help you save money, protect your health and reduce the risk of damaging your septic system and the quality of your drinking water, lake, pond or stream. Use these tips in conjunction with water quality bulletin #7080, *Your Septic System*.

Conserving Water Saves Money

Maine has abundant water resources. In some parts of the country, water conservation by homeowners is necessary, just to have enough water for basic needs. But why conserve here in water-rich Maine?

The simplest answer is that conserving water saves money—in many cases, very significant amounts of money. If you depend on your own well and septic system, the hundreds of extra gallons of water released each day will, over a period of years, continually saturate the soil in the septic system absorption field to a point where extensive repair or replacement is necessary. Replacing a septic system can easily cost over \$5,000, depending on where you live. Conserving water can extend the life of the system and delay the need for repair. If you live in an area serviced by a municipal water system, the greater your water use, the more you pay for water.

In addition to saving money, water conservation can help prevent water pollution. Overloading a septic system may cause nutrient and bacterial contamination of nearby lakes, streams and drinking water, even the water

from your own well. The smaller the amount of water flowing through these systems, the lower the likelihood of pollution. Pollution costs money, too. Excessive weed growth in a lake caused by nutrient enrichment from poorly functioning septic systems often means costly weed control measures paid for by you and your neighbors. Polluted home water wells, if they can be repaired at all, can cost thousands of dollars to fix.

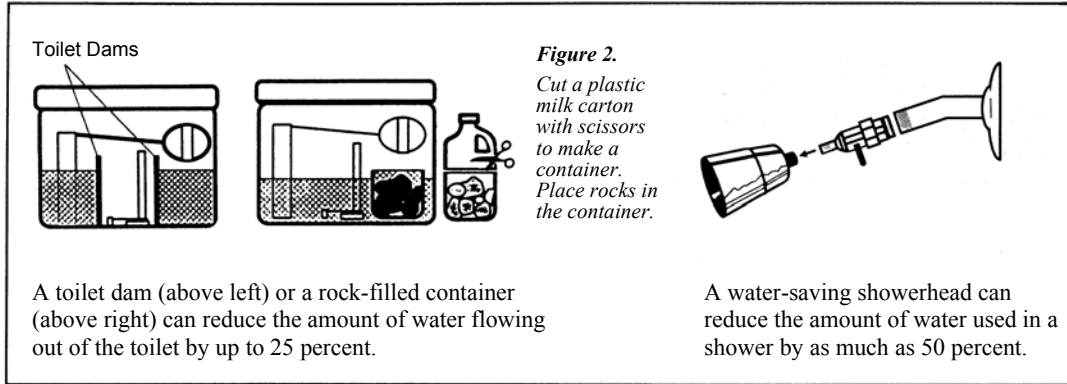
Water Use Around Your House

The first step in understanding how to conserve water in your home is to know where water is used. Most people use 45 to 50 gallons of water indoors each day and that much again outdoors, depending on the season. Indoors, three-quarters of all the water is used in the bathroom (Fig. 1). Outdoors, lawn and garden watering and car washing account for most of the water used.

How to Conserve Water Daily

Because such a large percentage of the water use is in the bathroom, that is where water conservation efforts should begin. You can install a few simple, inexpensive devices in the bathroom that can save a lot of water with no change in your lifestyle or your present habits. Many hardware and plumbing supply stores stock these items.

Toilet dams or rock-filled containers for conventional flush toilets: These devices (one of which you can make yourself, Fig. 2) can reduce the amount of water flowing out of the toilet by up to 25 percent without affecting its flushing ability. Never use a brick to accomplish



the same effect—particles from it could harm your plumbing. Older toilets use five gallons of water per flush. Consider installing one of the new "low-volume" toilets now on the market. Some of these use as little as a quart of water per flush! Almost all new toilets sold will be a low-volume flush.

Low-flow, water-saving showerheads: This plumbing device (Fig. 2) reduces the amount of water flowing through your shower by up to 50 percent, but increases the velocity so the shower feels the same. This also saves hot water. You may even be able to avoid buying a larger water heater in the future. With the increasing cost of fuel, this can save money!

Faucet aerators: These devices restrict the amount of water going through your faucet by up to 50 percent but add bubbles so the flow of water appears the same. They can be installed on all of your faucets, not just the ones in your bathroom.

Here are some other relatively simple things you can do to further reduce water use:

Repair leaks in your faucets and toilets. A leaky faucet can waste 20 gallons or more per day. Leaky toilets, even though they are usually silent, can waste hundreds of gallons per day. To find out if your toilet leaks, put a little

food coloring in the tank. If, without flushing, color appears in the bowl, you have a leak that should be repaired. Repairing a faucet is usually as simple as changing an inexpensive washer. Leaky toilets often can be repaired by adjusting the float arm or plunger ball.

Use your dishwasher and clothes washer only when you have a full load. If you are purchasing a new clothes washer, choose one with variable load or suds-saver options. Many dishwashers are also now available with water-saving options. If you already have these options, use them whenever possible.

If you are building a new home or remodeling an old one, consider installing low-flush toilets. These toilets use one to two gallons per flush instead of the three to five gallons used by conventional toilets. They are readily available and although they cost more, they can save a lot of money in the long run.

To conserve water outdoors, try these tips:

Attach a pistol-type sprayer to the end of your garden hose. This device enables you to adjust the rate of flow, and keep water from running during periods when you put down the hose without turning it off (while washing your car, for example).

Water your lawn only when necessary. It takes 660 gallons of water to supply 1,000 square feet of lawn with one inch of water. This is nearly the same amount of water that you use inside in an entire week! Water your lawn only when it begins to show signs of wilting—when the grass does not spring back when you step on it.

Saving Water in Special Situations

Sometimes it is necessary to use extra measures to reduce the amount of water you use in your house. Although useful in any situation, these techniques may be especially helpful or even necessary when: water levels are high around your house; your septic system shows signs of failing; or your community water system temporarily loses capacity to supply adequate amounts of water.

Indoors, you should consider these changes:

Take short showers instead of baths. A four-minute shower can use as little as eight gallons of water. A bath takes 50 to 60 gallons.

Avoid flushing your toilet unnecessarily. Don't use it as a means of disposing of waste tissue paper. Use a wastebasket instead.

Turn off the faucet while you shave, brush your teeth or wash dishes by hand.

Avoid running water in the shower while you shampoo or soap up. Many water-saving showerheads come with a button to shut off the flow without changing the mix of hot and cold water.

Outdoors, try these:

Use mulch around trees and shrubs and in garden beds. This greatly reduces the amount of water lost through evaporation and so reduces the need for watering.

Consider using a drip irrigation system in your garden. It supplies water only to the root zones of plants and reduces weeding because it doesn't water areas between crop rows and hills.

Use only plant varieties that are well adapted to your locality and soil conditions. Less suitable varieties may need more fertilizer or water to live.

Use the water from your roof downspouts for watering your garden and flower beds. For help in locating water-saving devices or other advice about water conservation, contact your local health department or Cooperative Extension office.

This material is supported by USDA special project number 92-EWQI-I-9231. Adapted from Maintaining Your Septic System, a set of Cornell Cooperative Extension fact sheets authored by D. Solomon and E. Dersch, Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service, and J. Saumier, Cornell Cooperative Extension.

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