

YOU COULD BE WASTING 170 GALLONS OF WATER A DAY WITHOUT KNOWING IT

A pinhole leak in a bathroom faucet - the kind that produces a steady "drip, drip, drip" - can add up to 170 gallons of water lost in 24 hours. That's enough to fill six to eight bathtubs.

Water usage varies from family to family, but on the average a four-person household uses 225 gallons a day.

Here's where it goes:

- Flushing toilet: 100 gallons
- Bathing and showering - 80 gallons
- Laundry: 35 gallons
- Dishwashing: 15 gallons
- Cooking and drinking: 12 gallons
- Bathroom sink: 8 gallons
- Miscellaneous: 5 gallons

Watering the lawn or turning the hose on the family car can boost the total quickly. A half-inch garden hose under normal pressure sprays more than 600 gallons of water an hour.

Most families could cut the 225-gallons consumption figure by 25 percent - or 56 gallons - without making any real sacrifices. Each flush of a conventional toilet, for example, uses four or five gallons. Inexpensive devices - a water-filled plastic bottle in the tank, for example, can cut that amount by up to 1 1/4 gallons. Water-saving toilets cost little more than conventional toilets and use only 3 1/2 gallons per flush.

A typical showerhead gushes at the rate of four gallons per minute. A five-minute shower uses 20 gallons. An inexpensive flow restrictor cuts the gush to three gallons a minute. Specially designed showerheads reduce the rate to two gallons a minute.

Leaky faucets cause a lot of waste. A steady stream of water, bigger than a drip, but still tiny, means a loss of 970 gallons a day - more than four times the average family's consumption.

Tips to conserve water (over)

Tips to conserve water:

- Take shorter showers and use a low-flow showerhead.
- Only do full loads of wash.
- Run the dishwasher when fully loaded.
- Scrape, don't rinse, dishes before loading the dishwasher.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in a basin of water.
- Don't defrost foods under running water.
- Only water plants when they need it.
- Avoid using the toilet for a wastebasket. Every flush you eliminate can save between two and seven gallons of water.
- Use a low flow toilet. Or use plastic bottles filled with water and pebbles to displace water in the tank. Don't obstruct the float. Don't use bricks.
- Don't let the water run while you brush your teeth or shave.
- When you're finished bathing, use the bath water to clean the tub.
- For heavy cleaning, use water you've saved from other household uses. Limit soaps and cleaning agents.
- Use a pool cover to reduce evaporation.

Be garden smart:

- During droughts, follow local watering restrictions.
- Water during the coolest part of the day and avoid windy days.
- Water deep-rooted trees and shrubs longer and less frequently; water shallow-rooted flowers with less water and more often.
- Use mulch to keep soil moist and cut weed growth.
- Raise mower-cutting height and minimize lawn fertilizer.

Locate and fix leaks:

- Add several drops of food coloring to the toilet tank. If it's leaking, the coloring will appear in the toilet without flushing.
- Twice a year, check all faucets inside and outside for leaks. Replace worn-out fixtures, washers, O-rings and hose connections.