During a Drought, Little Changes Make a Big Difference

In the Salt Lake Valley, our current state of drought is a big deal--99.39% of the state is experiencing a severe drought or worse. Water makes up 55-65% of each of us. It’s a precious resource we use, consume, and likely take for granted, every single day of our lives. If all of us adopt small changes, we can significantly lessen the negative impact of drought both now and in the future. If you’ve been thinking that you ought to do a little more to use a little less water, here’s a list of things you may not have thought of yet:

Indoor Water Conservation Tips

Bathroom

* Avoid flushing the toilet unnecessarily. Dispose of tissues, insects, and other similar waste in the trash rather than the toilet.
* Take short showers instead of baths; turn on water only to get wet and lather and then again to rinse off.
* Avoid letting the water run while brushing your teeth, washing your face, or shaving.
* Place a bucket in the shower to catch excess water for watering plants.

Kitchen

* Operate automatic dishwashers only when they are fully loaded. Use the "light wash" feature, if available, to use less water.
* Hand wash dishes by filling two containers—one with soapy water and the other with rinse water containing a small amount of chlorine bleach.
* Clean vegetables in a pan filled with water rather than running water from the tap.
* Store drinking water in the refrigerator. Do not let the tap run while you are waiting for water to cool.
* Avoid wasting water waiting for it to get hot. Capture it for other uses such as plant watering, drinking, or cleaning.
* Avoid rinsing dishes before placing them in the dishwasher; just remove large particles of food. (Most dishwashers can clean soiled dishes very well, so dishes do not have to be rinsed before washing).
* Avoid using running water to thaw meat or other frozen foods. Defrost food overnight in the refrigerator or use the defrost setting on your microwave oven.

Laundry

* Operate automatic clothes washers only when they are fully loaded or set the appropriate water level for the size of your load.
* Adopt the habit of evaluating is something really needs to be laundered. Consider re-using or re-wearing towels or clothes that aren’t “really” dirty.

Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

Car Washing

* Do not wash your car by handheld hose.
* If you use a commercial car wash, consider using a car wash that recycles water.

Lawn Care

* Follow all outdoor watering restrictions.
* Avoid over watering your lawn and water only when needed to keep it from completely dying. Water only in the early in the morning or later in the evening, when temperatures are cooler and water is less likely to evaporate.
* A heavy rain eliminates the need for watering for up to two weeks. Most of the year, lawns only need one inch of water per week.
* Check the soil moisture levels with a soil probe, spade or large screwdriver. You don't need to water if the soil is still moist. If your grass springs back when you step on it, it doesn't need water yet.
* Check your sprinkler system frequently and adjust sprinklers so only your lawn is watered and not the house, sidewalk, driveway or street.
* Water in several short sessions rather than one long one, in order for your lawn to better absorb moisture and avoid runoff.
* Use a broom or blower instead of a hose to clean leaves and other debris from your driveway or sidewalk.
* Avoid leaving sprinklers or hoses unattended. A garden hose can pour out 600 gallons or more in only a few hours.
* In extreme drought, allow lawns to go unwatered in favor of preserving trees and large shrubs.

## If you really want to go the extra mile, you can consider adjusting your consumer habits. Manufacturing and processing are big water users. You could:

* Drive less- To produce a gallon of gasoline, it takes, on average, three to six gallons of water (<https://www.watercalculator.org/footprint/the-water-footprint-of-energy/>)
* Purchase fewer new clothes. The world uses 1.3 trillion gallons of water each year for fabric dyeing alone, enough to fill 2 million Olympic-sized swimming pools. (<https://www.wri.org/insights/apparel-industrys-environmental-impact-6-graphics>)
* Eat less beef- It takes approximately 1,847 gallons of water to produce 1 pound of beef — that's enough water to fill 39 bathtubs all the way to the top (<https://www.denverwater.org/tap/whats-beef-water>)
* Avoid packaging—When at the grocery store, bring your own containers for purchasing items from bulk bins, dry goods, and produce, and comparison shop for producers that keep packaging simple. It takes [22 gallons of water](http://waterfootprint.org/media/downloads/Zygmunt_2007.pdf) to make one pound of plastic. (<https://www.watercalculator.org/footprint/the-hidden-water-in-everyday-products/>)
* Want to see more? Here’s how much water it takes to produce 30 common items: (<https://stacker.com/stories/2592/how-much-water-it-takes-create-30-common-items>)

All told, the water that keeps America afloat on a sea of consumer goods is enormous. As some of the biggest shoppers on the planet, the [average American’s water footprint](https://www.watercalculator.org/footprint/how-united-states-uses-water/) for buying, using and throwing away consumer goods (excluding food) is [583 gallons of water per day](http://waterfootprint.org/media/downloads/Report16Vol1.pdf).

## If you want to read more about water scarcity, safety, and potential future economic implications, check out [The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water](https://www.amazon.com/The-Big-Thirst-Charles-Fishman-audiobook/dp/B004W5KHHU/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=27GBIUCO7WA6E&keywords=the+big+thirst+charles+fishman&qid=1657576460&s=books&sprefix=The+Big+Thirst%2Cstripbooks%2C159&sr=1-1) by Charles Fishman or [When the Rivers Run Dry: Water-The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century](https://smile.amazon.com/Rivers-Fully-Revised-Updated-Water/dp/0807054895/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=2AVUMOR78DNO&keywords=When+Rivers+Run+Dry&qid=1657581237&sprefix=when+rivers+run+dry%2Caps%2C174&sr=8-1) by Fred Pearce.

You can also find more drought information at: [Drought.utah.gov](https://water.utah.gov/water-data/drought/)