

The new liquid gold, WATER.
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Many of us take for granted that we turn on the faucet and out pours clean water. However, it is important to remember that this resource should be conserved and used sparingly. According to the EPA, the average family of four uses approximately 400 gallons of water per day. In Ashland, 50% of our water is used indoors while the other 50% is typically used outdoors. While those of us living in Ashland, and more generally, the Pacific Northwest, are fortunate to have a generally wet climate, it is important to remember that less than 1% of the Earth's water is available for everyday use. On top of that, the threat of global climate destabilization predicts greater snowpack variability for our region, the primary source of our water supply. What many of us do not realize is that saving water can be easy. For example, one of the top household water wasters is a leaky toilet. A poorly working toilet can leak up to 200 gallons of day. Yikes. To wrap your head around that think of 40 five gallon buckets stacked up. Double Yikes. But by checking for that leak or buying a high efficiency WaterSense labeled toilet, which uses 20 - 75% less water each time you flush, you can make a huge impact on conserving water.

The benefits of saving water are not simply altruistic; you can potentially save big bucks. In recent research conducted by the EPA, easily corrected household water leaks accounted for as much as 8% of an average home owner's water bill. There is money to be saved by changing simple habits and investing in upgraded equipment and appliances.

Some of the most important water conservation steps involve changing the way we do things. Take for example washing dishes, by only using your dishwasher when it is completely full and skipping the pre wash step, you can save hundreds of gallons a month. Even better, fill your sink and don't run the water but for a quick rinse. You just banked 25 gallons on average. Another example is in the bathroom. By turning off the tap while shaving or brushing your teeth, you can easily save several gallons of water per day. Better yet, look for WaterSense labeled bathroom faucet aerators at your local hardware store that have a flow of 0.5 to 1.5 gallons per minute. They function well while using half as much water as current standard faucets. Changing out a bathroom faucet aerator is both simple and low cost and could save a family of four up to 40 gallons of water per day.

For example, if you have a low flow WaterSense labeled shower head and take a 5 minute shower, you might use only 10 to 15 gallons of water. If you compare this to a bath which can be as high as 70 gallons it really does make sense to rise off quickly, or better yet, shower with a friend and double down on your savings.

For those with a larger water savings budget, high-efficiency Energy Star washing machines can save as much as 40 gallons per load. When you consider the fact that clothes washing accounts for as much as 21.7% of water use in a house, that can be a huge savings. Additionally, as linked to on the City Conservation Commission website, greywater reuse systems can allow you to get double duty out of your clothes washing water. These systems, which require a simple permit for the State Department of Environmental Quality and some equipment, take the water from your washer and use it for subsurface irrigation of trees and shrubs. Not only do you get this double duty from the water but you reduce the loads put on the waste water treatment plant and more importantly the cornucopia of aquatic and riparian life which call Bear Creek home.

Another major move has been to replace, upgrade or remove irrigation. Inefficient or poorly maintained irrigation systems can waste water and money. Just think of any time you have seen an over irrigated yard spilling water into the street. Wow, that cost all of us in the long run. The use of targeted drip irrigation, moisture sensors and rain shut-off devices can have a dramatic impact on water wastage and for those truly committed to saving water, rip out water wasting plants like grass and replace the with more ecologically appropriate plants. Your neighbors will think you're all the rage with your new look and no more mowing.

You see, water savings is all about taking little steps to cut down on our usage. We must be conscious about how we make use of this scarce resource. If we each save a gallon here and a gallon there per day, collectively we can easily save tens of thousands of gallons that will benefit all of us in the long term. Remember, don't be a water hog, be water wise!

For information on City of Ashland water conservation programs, incentives, rebates and technical assistance, visit www.ashland.or.us/conserve.