

As you look at the lakes and canals around your house, you are probably aware that water levels are lower than you can remember for quite some time. We have been fortunate that we have made it two years without a hurricane hitting Florida. The flip side of this is that during our four-month "wet season," while precipitation in the northern and central Florida regions reported normal, we have experienced drier than normal rainfall in the southern Florida region. To compound this, climatologists are predicting a La Nina event, which calls for a drier than normal fall, winter and spring in Florida.

South Florida Water Management District plans to recommend that our district enter into a Phase III water restriction following the December 13 board meeting. That means residential watering is limited to FOUR hours a day, ONE day a week! That's what you'll see on the Florida Water Management website, so be ready to see your water bill go up! Since water use decreases with increases in the price of water, this is a prime way to curb water usage.

Typically, outdoor water use accounts for up to 50 percent of water consumed by households. Did you know that even a small leak can waste 300 or more gallons of water per month? You can reduce your outdoor water consumption by taking a few simple steps.


1. Irrigation leaks are quite common and can be a significant drain of water. Watch for broken or misdirected sprinklers. Cut your grass at the highest recommended height for your turf species, or the highest setting on your lawn mower. Collect water in a rain barrel to use to water your plants and/or use drip irrigation, the most efficient method of watering bedded plants, trees or shrubs.

2. Know and follow your local watering restrictions, but don't water just because it's your day. Evaporation loss can be 60 percent higher during the day, so water during the cool, early morning hours. Avoid watering on windy days. Rain shutoff devices are required by Florida law on all automatic sprinkler systems installed since 1991. Check regularly to ensure the device is working properly.

3. Sophisticated soil moisture sensors will turn on your automatic irrigation system when water is needed, while the more basic sensors turn off your system when water is adequate. Reliable soil moisture sensor technology is currently available in irrigation supply stores and have come down significantly in price.

4. If you don't already have low-flow fixtures and toilets inside your home, you will want to replace them. Since the mid-1990s, all new toilets have been redesigned to conserve water, using just 1.6 gallons of water per flush. Older models use 3 gallons or more per flush. If your toilet is not a newer water-saving fixture, consider replacing it.

5. Check everywhere for leaks. Leaks inside your toilet can waste up to 100 gallons per day. Some leaks are silent, some produce a running water sound and others may be visible as a small trickle running from the rim to the water in the bowl. Even a small faucet leak can waste 300 or more gallons of water per month!



Safe and Efficient Homes in SW Florida: Understanding your water bill

6. By timing your showers and installing low-flow showerheads, you can save water. New low-volume showerheads deliver 2.5 gallons of water per minute, while older high-volume fixtures can deliver as much as 8 gallons per minute. To determine if your showerheads and faucets flow at recommended rates, call the Southwest Florida Water Management District at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476, ext. 4612, and request a free shower flow bag.

7. Here are some more tips for conserving water inside your home: When I lived in drought-ridden San Francisco in the 1990's, the local expression was, "If it's yellow just be mellow, if it's brown flush it down." While brushing teeth, shaving, etc., turn off the water. When cold water will do, avoid using hot water. Install instant water heaters in bathrooms and in the kitchen, or collect the initial cold water in a bucket for use in the garden or the pool. Scrape, don't rinse, your dishes before loading in the dishwasher. Use your garbage disposal sparingly and start composting your kitchen waste. And the best advice we have is: shower with a loved one!

Remember, the average Floridian uses about 124 gallons of water each day. Use your water meter to check for leaks! If we don't conserve, we're pouring water — and money — down the drain. So stop the leaks, slow the flow and use water wisely!

Mara Muller has lived in Naples since 1996 with her husband and 2 school age daughters. Her focus is helping families reach their Real Estate Goals. She was the Women's Council of Realtors' Top Team Producer for 2006 and has just joined Premier Properties. Contact her at www.MaraSellsNaples.com or 597-3332 with all your real estate questions.