

# ADVICE ON SAVING WATER FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

## Are you saving water?

Saving water at home, in the garden, or at work can take little effort, but makes a big difference.

The key is for everyone to reduce personal wastage, ie. turning the tap off when you brush your teeth, can save up to 5 litres a minute. If the entire adult population of England and Wales did this, we could save 180 million litres a day, enough to supply nearly 500,000 houses.

## Why should I save water?

Water is not as abundant in England and Wales as you would think. We only have 1,334 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) per person a year – much less than France (3,065 m<sup>3</sup>) or even the hotter Mediterranean countries of Italy (2,785 m<sup>3</sup>) and Spain (2,775 m<sup>3</sup>).

South East England has even less water per person due to its high population density and low rainfall. The Thames Valley has only 266m<sup>3</sup>, only a fifth of the England and Wales average.

Dry winters have the biggest impact on water resources. Winter rain tops up groundwater supplies while summer rain only helps reduce water consumption as we don't have to water our gardens or wash our cars. Saving water will make sure that the water we do get lasts, particularly as it is impossible to predict how long a drought will continue.

Water shortages don't just affect us: they can also seriously harm our environment. Our water comes from rivers and groundwater so every drop we use has a direct effect on the environment.

Fish, wetland birds and other wildlife that rely on ponds, rivers and streams struggle to survive when these dry up or run low. Sources of food and breeding sites for wildlife can be lost and fish can die through lack of oxygen.

The average person in England and Wales uses 150 litres of water every day. Most of it is used for washing and toilet flushing, but it also includes drinking, cooking, car washing and watering the garden. We use almost 50% more water than 25 years ago, partly because of the use of power showers and other water using household appliances.

## Rainwater Harvesting

Rainwater Harvesting is the collection of water that would otherwise have gone down the drain, into the ground or been lost through evaporation. Large surfaces such as roofs or driveways are ideal for rainwater harvesting and can provide up to 100m<sup>3</sup> (100,000 litres) of water per year from a medium sized area. This water can be used to flush toilets, water gardens and even feed the washing machine. Rainwater harvesting systems can be installed in both new and existing buildings, and the harvested water used for purposes that do not require drinking water quality. Rainwater harvesting has the potential to save a large volume of mains water and therefore help reduce the pressure on water resources.

## Is it for me?

Before deciding whether or not to install a system for home or work, consider the costs of buying, installing and maintaining the system.

- Calculate the volume of rainfall that can be collected from roof areas or driveways to see whether rainwater harvesting can meet your requirements.
- Work out the potential water and cost savings.

## Water-efficient gardening

There is much that gardeners can do to reduce the need for watering. Adding organic matter, home compost, composted bark or rotted manure at about a bucketful per square metre will boost the amount of water that soil can retain. Water efficient gardens also save labour, as there is less need to water them and mulches suppress the growth of weeds.

Choosing plants suited to the soil and site will mean that they grow good roots which can search out moisture. Mulching with organic matter such as bark chips or with other materials such as gravel or ornamental crushed glass will help to promote good root growth and reduce moisture losses from the soil. Newly planted areas and newly laid lawns won't survive without watering if you plant them in the summer. Set out plants and lawns as early in spring as possible so that they develop good roots early. If drought strikes, these should have top priority for whatever water is available.

Lawns can survive drought very well and even if brown recover when rain returns. Gravel and other mulches, or prostrate evergreen plants such as Juniperus squamata, can be used as an alternative to lawns.

## Saving water in the public sector

Did you know that with the introduction of the Water Act 2003, all public bodies now have a duty to 'conserve water'? By monitoring your water use and comparing it to benchmarks you can save up to 50% of your water bill. The Water Act 2003 places a duty on all public bodies to 'take into account, where relevant, the desirability of conserving water supplied or to be supplied to premises'. This means that all public bodies should reduce the water used on their premises to an efficient level.

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## WATER USAGE

HOW MANY LITRES TO...		
Fill a kettle:	1	
Fill a watering can:	5	Flush a toilet: 9
Have a shower:	30-50	Use a dishwasher: 25-60
Fill a bath:	80	Do laundry: 70-120

Source: BBC News