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DROUGHT OR NO DROUGHT— IT IS TIME FOR WATER CONSERVATION

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Water conservation is critical, particularly now, with the hot, dry weather we have been experiencing in Aransas County. The availability of good quality water is an increasing concern, and will continue to be one, not just in Texas, but across the country, and throughout the world. We need to develop an attitude of conserving water so we will be conscious of using less water in all aspects of our lives.

Some tips on how we can all do our part in conserving water follow:

*Stop leaks.* The first step is to make sure your home is leak-free. Not only do leaks waste water, they add to the size of your water and sewer bill, or put a strain on your septic system.

Check water-using appliances and devices for leaks. Many silent leaks allow water and your money to go down the drain. Dripping faucets that are leaking at a rate of just one drop per second can waste 2,700 gallons of water per year.

Toilet tank leaks account for much of the water wasted in homes. A leaky toilet can waste a whopping 200 gallons per day. Check for toilet tank leaks by adding food coloring to the tank. If the toilet is leaking, color will appear in the bowl within 30 minutes (flush when you finish the test). Most replacement parts are inexpensive, readily available, and easily installed.

Another large water waster can be irrigation system leaks; fix these leaks quickly.

*Change behaviors*. Examples of possible changes that could save water in the bathroom include: taking 4-minute showers; turning the water off while shampooing hair in the shower; turning water off while shaving or brushing teeth; and never using the toilet as a waste basket.

In the kitchen: keep drinking water in the refrigerator instead of letting the faucet run until the water is cool; thaw food in the refrigerator overnight rather than running water over it; scrape rather than rinse dishes when loading the dishwasher; run the dishwasher only when it is full; and add food waste to a compost pile or put it in the garbage instead of using the disposal.

In the laundry area, wash only full loads, or at least use the appropriate water level or load size selection on the washing machine.

Outside your home, sweep sidewalks and driveways rather than hosing them off; use soaker hoses rather than sprinklers to provide water only to plants you want and to avoid evaporation; and wash the car with water from a bucket, or consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water.

*Install water-efficient appliances and fixtures*. Homes with high-efficiency plumbing fixtures and appliances save about 30 percent of indoor water use and yield substantial savings on water, sewer, and energy bills (EPA). The Water Sense label on bathroom sink faucets, showerheads, toilets, etc. makes it easy to find and select water-efficient products.  Below are some examples of changes that can be made.

Install toilets with the water-saving 1.6 gallon per flush, or put something in the tank to displace some of the water.  The toilet is the largest water user in your home, don’t flush it unnecessarily.

Make sure each showerhead releases 2.5 gallons per minute (gpm) or less. Today, all showerheads sold are regulated to meet the 2.5 gpm maximum requirement. To make the flow feel like more water is coming out, turn the head dial to reduce the number of sprays or inner spray settings.

Replace your clothes washer – it is the second largest in-home water user. Energy Star™ rated washers, which also have a Water Factor at or lower than 9.5, use 35-50 percent less water and 50 percent less energy per load (EPA), saving you money on both water and energy bills.

Consider adding a water heater. Gallons of water are wasted while waiting for hot water to get to the shower in many homes. The waste may be as much as 3 gallons for each shower taken.  In new homes, this can be addressed by placing water heaters near points of hot water use. In older homes, one may simply need to catch the cold water and use it for watering plants or filling the dog’s bowl. Tankless water heating systems may save energy, but where they are located determines whether or not they save water.

*Reduce water use in the landscape*. From 50 to 75 percent of a home’s total water use during the growing season may be used outdoors. It’s important to develop a plan or convert your current landscape to include plants and a design that are appropriate for our Coastal Bend climate. Use native or adapted plants and consider a more natural landscape.  Maintaining a large lawn in a dry climate uses significant amounts of water.

Water during the coolest part of the day and never during the heat of the day. Use soaker hoses or trickle irrigation for trees and shrubs and water them longer and less frequently than shallow-rooted plants. Don’t water plants that do not need the water. Be attentive to your watering time and frequency.  Most plants do well with less water than what people think they need.

Maintain your irrigation system; check it for leaks and adjust it regularly.  Make sure the controller has a rain shutoff device (it really will rain again!).  Apply a 3-4” layer of mulch around shrubs and garden plants to reduce evaporation from the soil surface and to cut down on weed growth.  Keep it a couple inches from the trunk or stem.

Remember, what every one of us does affects the quality and quantity of the water available. Protect our precious water resources now and in the future. Help save Texas’ water, and make every drop count.  This information is provided by Texas AgriLife Extension.