



# 7 Things Every Homeowner Should Know About the Aquapocalypse

Published: July 14, 2014

By: Deirdre Sullivan

Be the first to comment

Tagged in: **Green Living** **Saving Water**

Right now close to 50% of the U.S. is experiencing some level of drought. Why should homeowners care?



Image: Tim Chavez



**1.** Thanks to climate change, California's aquapocalypse is spreading. Over the next couple of decades more than 400 counties in the U.S. may be going through an extreme dry spell, according to a study by the Natural Resources Defense Council. How bad can it get?



*Image: Michael Dubois - Hollister*

**2.** You won't be able to flush the toilet during daylight hours, take a shower longer than five minutes, or wash your dishes using fresh water. Parts of the Southern plains and Western states already are facing water restrictions.

**FYI:** The 1930s drought that turned the Great Plains into a dust bowl was also caused by environmental damage.



*Image: Simon Yeo*

**3.** Running your sprinkler will be forbidden — just like in water-scarce Sacramento where “water police” fine homeowners for illegal lawn watering.

**Fact:** If the drought continues through Oct. 1, it will be California’s driest year in half a millenium.



*Image: jlsohio/iStockphoto*

**4.** And since water is vital to agricultural and energy production, drought also causes exorbitant grocery bills, soaring electricity rates, and killer gas prices.

**Fact:** Lake Mead could dry up by 2021. It's already hit its lowest level since the dam was built in the 1930s. Currently, it supplies water to 22 million people in the Southwest.



*Image: wholden/iStockphoto*

**5.** Even chilling at home with a cold one can become a pricey luxury. Right now in parts of the country breweries are being asked to reduce their water use. Mandatory reductions may make beer as expensive as a prestigious champagne.

If drought persists, you may not even like how beer tastes in the future. Using quality local water is key when it comes to making stellar suds. Brewing with anything less, which may happen if our rivers run dry, can make your favorite beer taste like a Popsicle stick.



*Image: Libby Walker for HouseLogic*

**6.** As our population increases and our water withdrawals grow higher, cities all over the country — including Atlanta, Cleveland, Salt Lake City, and Washington D.C. — may run bone-dry by mid-century, according to NOAA's Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences.



*Image: Andre Engels/Wikipedia*

**7.** You CAN take action now to help future-proof your home against drought by eliminating your home's worst water-hogging habits.

**The worst water hog is landscaping.** Our yards consume 30% of our home's total water use — more than the household yearly average for washing clothes and showering combined. What's the problem? Up to 50% of the water we use outside is wasted on over-watering our lawns.

First steps:

Give your sprinkler a break. Grass is not supposed to be bright green during the dog days of summer, according to the EPA. So water your lawn only when it's truly thirsty. To check, step on your grass. If it doesn't spring back, it's time to water.

Let the grass grow. Longer grass reduces water evaporation, and as a bonus you'll have fewer weeds.

Give your sprinkler system a tuneup. Leaks and clogs can waste lots of water. A broken sprinkler head can pour 25,000 gallons of water down the drain over a six month period.

Big strides:

Water your lawn more efficiently with a Watersense-labeled irrigation controller. It's like a programmable thermostat for your sprinkler system because it controls when and how much you water your lawn.

Are you still letting rainy days go to waste? We shared the ins and outs of installing a rain barrel. Don't have gutters? That's not an excuse. You can DIY a drain barrel like the one pictured here.



*Image: Karen MacEwan*

Giant leaps:

Hydro-zone your yard by grouping plants with similar watering needs in the same area. It make it easier to avoid over-watering

Landscape using parch-proof plants. It's a great way to conserve water without sacrificing curb appeal.

Go with fake turf. It's a low maintenance solution that never needs watering.

**The second biggest water hog is the toilet.** Up to 19% of your abode's total water-use is flushed down the loo.

First step:



Check if your toilet is hemorrhaging water. Toilet leaks can waste up to 200 gallons of water daily (and that can total \$840 per year!). To test for leaks put a few drops of food coloring in your toilet's tank (but don't flush) If the water in your bowl changes color within 15 minutes, it's leaking.



Image: Liz Foreman for HouseLogic

#### Big stride:

Have an ancient commode? Upgrade to one with the Watersense label. They use 1.28 gallons per flush (gpf) or less compared to standard toilets made after 1992 that meet the federal standard of 1.6 gpf.

#### Giant leap:

Go with a composting potty. They require little to no water, and modern models are easy to use and look like regular toilets. They're also a great solution to sanitation and environmental problems in unsewered, rural, and suburban areas.

**The third biggest water guzzler is the clothes washer.** It can account for as much as 15% of your household's yearly total. A washer can also drive up your electricity bill from heating hot water to wringing clothes during the spin cycle. Here are three ways you can avoid getting hosed:

First step:

Check your washer's settings. Don't opt for second rinse cycle. If you have to wash a small load use the appropriate water level or load size selection.

Big stride:

Your standard washer is about to become an energy-sucking dinosaur. All basic front loaders will have to meet today's Energy Star requirements by 2015, and top loaders by 2018. If you replace your washer with an Energy Star model, you'll use around 35% less water and 20% less electricity.

Giant leap:

Have a plumber re-route your washing machine's greywater to trees and plants rather than the sewer line.



Image: Ecology Action/Greywater Action

**Showers and faucets round out the top five ways we consume water:** Showers account for 12% and faucets account for 11% of our yearly use. Here are the top three ways you can cut back.

### First step:

Wash like you're in the Navy. To conserve water on naval ships, sailors would hop in the shower and quickly douse themselves in water, then turn off the water, get all sudsy, and turn back on the water to quickly rinse off. While a regular shower can use around 60 gallons of water, washing like a sailor can use as little as three gallons.

### Big stride:

Replace your standard shower and bathroom faucet fixtures with ones marked **Watersense**. Doing so will shave 700 gallons off your faucet use and trim 2,900 gallons per year off shower use.



Image: Jennifer Griffin of *Dimples & Tangles*

### Giant leap:

Stop running your faucet or shower while waiting for it to turn hot. A hot water recirculating system can save water and energy, according to Energy Star. Instead of sending cool water that's been sitting in your home's hot water pipes when a water fixture is turned on, the system sends the cool water back to the heater via the cold water line while sending hot water directly from the heater.

**Bonus Fact:** If you make water conservation improvements to your home now, you'll not only save money on utility bills, your home will be more marketable and may even garner a higher price than less water efficient homes.

**Related:** Colorful Plants That Can Tough Out a Drought



Deirdre Sullivan is an NYC-based writer who's obsessed with maximizing every inch of her urban dwelling. She's a former fashionista who has worked for Lucky Magazine and InStyle. She recently traded her high heels and Fashion Week pass for a drill and bandsaw. Follow Deirdre on Google+.

## E RECOMMEND



3 Biggest Air Leak in Your House  
u Don't Know About



7 Things You Should Paint Instead of  
Replace to Save Money



4 Affordable DIYs That Boost Home  
Value

Recommended by

© Copyright 2014 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS