

green saver

Rae Doble

A fine drop

You don't have to fork out a fortune to save water in your home



LET'S FACE IT, THERE'S NOT MUCH financial incentive to save water. With water so cheap any conservation technique is going to have little impact on the final bill. But we live in a drought-prone country and our growing population means we will always be hit with water restrictions in some form.

At 350 litres each a day, Australians have one of the highest domestic water usage rates in the world. You don't need to make costly renovations to bring this figure down. For under \$60, and a few changes to the way you use water, you can save thousands of litres a year and reduce your annual water bill by up to \$100.

The bathroom is the most water-hungry area in the average home, comprising about 40% of your total water usage. Modern dual-flush toilets use three to six litres, considerably less than an old single-flush model which uses 11 litres per flush. You can

Australians have one of the highest domestic water usage rates in the world

replace just the cistern or, if you can't afford the expense, there are several water-saving devices available on the market for under \$20 that can save you up to five litres a flush. For an even cheaper option, try putting a filled bottle of water in the tank. A two-litre bottle will reduce your water wastage by up to 3000 litres a year per person.

Old-style shower heads can see 20 litres a minute down the drain. Switching to a water-efficient AAA rated shower head will halve this. They retail for \$45, but local government water authorities will often sell them cheaper or provide them free. If you're handy, you can buy a water-restricting washer from your local hardware shop for around \$5 and install it in your shower-head. Setting a time limit on your showers



and using an egg timer as a monitor will also help you cut back.

Washing machines are another water guzzler. A water-efficient, front-loading washing machine uses 63% less water than a non-efficient top loader – a saving of 105 litres a wash. Not all of us can afford to buy a five-star machine. Instead, only wash when you have a full load. Using the “economy” and “suds saver” settings on your machine will reduce water use even further. And by connecting an Aquapore hose to your washing machine hose you can reuse the water for your garden. These sell for about \$20 at hardware shops; you can use a bucket for an even cheaper option.

Kitchens account for only 6% of total domestic water use, but there are many ways to save water. A three-star-rated dishwasher may use less water than hand washing, using only 18 litres a cycle versus a non-efficient dishwasher at 40 litres a cycle. Scrape plates rather than rinsing them, always have a full load and use the “economy” setting if you have one. Wash vegetables in a half-filled sink rather than under running water, or wash them in a basin in the sink and empty this into your cistern or onto the garden.

A running tap uses 17 litres a minute – an aerator, or flow regulator, will cut this by 50%. Aerators are around \$5 each and easy to install. In NSW, Sydney Water offers a free DIY water-saving kit with three flow regulators. Or reduce water pressure house-wide by turning back your mains tap a couple of notches.

Green tip

Leaks are one of the most common ways to see thousands of litres – and your hard-earned cash – down the drain every year. Check your toilet by placing a few drops of food dye in the cistern. If the water in the bowl changes colour you'll need to replace the corroded parts in the cistern. A leaking toilet can waste up to 96,000 litres a year – that's \$120 annually!

Don't forget to check your taps too. A dripping tap can be easily fixed for a dollar by replacing its washer, saving you up to 24,000 litres and \$30 a year.

Another good use for a dollar is investing in a bucket in the shower to catch excess water. While you wait for the hot water to arrive, five to 10 litres of water is wasted.

Catch it instead and put it on your garden, in your washing machine or the cistern of your toilet. It may not sound like much, but do it daily and you will save around 3650 litres a year – enough for 90 loads in a four-star front-loading washing machine.