



Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments  
777 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20002  
Phone: (202) 962-3000  
[www.mwcog.org](http://www.mwcog.org)

## **Wise Water Conservation Tips Winter and Early Spring**

Awareness is the first step in conservation.

### **General Maintenance**

#### [Winterize your pipes](#)

Make sure that all outdoor spigots are winterized; this could avoid pipes from freezing, bursting and losing water.

#### [Insulate](#)

Insulate hot water pipes to reduce the amount of water that must be run in order to get hot water to the faucet.

#### [Locate your master water shut off valve](#)

Also, remember to locate your master water shut off valve in your house – mark it for quick identification. If a water pipe were to break, it could cause flooding and tremendous water loss.

#### [Check for leaks in pipes, hoses, hose connections, and faucets](#)

Even a tiny leak can translate into thousands of gallons of wasted water over a short period of time. Repair or replace any equipment leaking water immediately.

#### [Use shut-off nozzles on hoses](#)

Use nozzles which completely turn off the water when you are not using it; they also help to more effectively direct water than using your finger to create a stream.

### **Prioritizing Water Usage**

#### [Prioritize Your Springtime Watering Needs Outdoors](#)

Now is a great time for you to prioritize the watering needs of all outdoor plants and trees. Take the time to determine which area of your yard needs the most water.

#### [Newly Planted Trees, Shrubs, Lawns](#)

Newly planted trees, shrubs, and lawns should receive the first priority when it comes to determining the need for water. While most plants and bushes are not planted until spring, those planted the previous year may not have time to develop extensive root systems. They usually depend only on surface water for their survival. Even during



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drought conditions, newly planted trees and shrubs can be over watered. Excess water can flood the root systems by replacing the oxygen with water. Check the root zone moisture by probing the soil with a metal rod, probe, or pipe. For lawns, trees, and shrubs, a simple electronic probe can help measure soil moisture and indicate when you should water. You can also insert a screwdriver into the soil as a simple gauge. On automatic sprinkler systems, install a moisture sensor. This is a probe placed in the ground that determines when the soil needs water and then turns on the sprinkler.

### [Young Trees and Shrubs](#)

Young trees and shrubs do not have as developed root systems as their older counterparts and will require more water as a result. During severe drought conditions, plants and trees up to six years of age may require additional watering during this time.

### [Keep weeds out of flower and vegetable gardens](#)

Weeds begin to appear around springtime and warmer weather. Weeds are notorious for stealing water away from other plants, so if you'll keep their populations in check, you won't have to water as often. With lawns, remove weeds by hand whenever possible to avoid tough competition.

### [Flowers, Gardens, and Older Plants](#)

Most early spring flower and vegetable gardens will require watering to stay productive. Mulching can help to retain additional moisture in the soil and around the roots. Most well-established trees and shrubs can withstand a prolonged period without rain or watering. Far more plants die from over-watering than under-watering. For many garden plants, the best way to know if plants need water is to let your finger be the guide. Dig down several inches near the base of the plant. If the soil is bone dry, that's an indication that you need to water. Also, when a plant begins to show signs of wilting, especially in the morning, it probably needs water.

### [Lawns](#)

As the springtime approaches, a healthy and well-maintained lawn becomes a focus. Lawns can tolerate long periods of drought by becoming dormant. Because a 5,000 sq. foot lawn needs up to 6,000 gallons of water per week to stay green – an expensive undertaking – it is easier to let lawns sleep through the drought than to waste water, money, and effort. Be sure to reduce foot traffic during this time. Avoid walking on grass during periods of drought stress. If mowing becomes necessary, mow lawns as little as possible during droughts to avoid additional stress, and cut at the highest possible setting. Never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade in one mowing. Allow mulched clippings to remain on the lawn to help cool the soil and retain moisture.



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### **Additional Water Conservation Measures**

#### Water without waste

Stop watering whenever runoff occurs, especially on slopes or on compacted, dry soils. That may mean turning the water on and off in cycles to allow moisture to soak into the ground, but it beats watching the water flow down the street.

#### Capture and recycle rainwater

Place rain barrels or buckets beneath your downspouts. 1,000 sq. ft. of roof surface will collect 420 gallons of water in every inch of rainfall. You can use rainwater for outdoor plants and trees or to wash your car.

#### Redirect water from downspouts

Channel storm water across lawns and into garden beds away from your house; consider "Rainscaping" by establishing a watershed-friendly garden, which will use snowmelt or stormwater to thrive and create beauty around your home, school, or office.

#### Mulch, Mulch, Mulch

Mulching helps to slow the evaporation of moisture from the soil and keeps the soil and roots cool. It also protects the soil and roots from events such as freezing. Try to stick with organic mulches that slowly break down and add organic matter to the soil.

#### Add Hydrogels

Add hydrogels to plants that dry out quickly; these water-absorbing polymer crystals swell to several times their original size and slowly release water into the surrounding soil. Hydrogels can be found at your local garden center.

### **Indoor Wise Water Use Ideas In the Bathroom**

#### Check pipes and faucets for leaks

Even small leaks can waste significant amounts of water. Water leaks are not only a waste of water, but also of the energy needed to heat the water.

#### Turn off the water when brushing teeth or shaving

This is a hard habit to break. We all are guilty of letting the water run while we brush our teeth. Yet, collectively we could save thousands of gallons of water a day if we just turned off the faucet until we need it.



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#### Take showers instead of baths

Baths use more water than a typical shower. If your shower has a single hand control or shut off valve, turn off the flow while soaping or shampooing.

#### Check the toilet for leaks

Leaks inside a toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day. Toilet leaks can be detected by using several drops of food coloring in the tank. You have a leak if you see the coloring in the bowl after a few minutes.

#### Don't use the toilet as a wastebasket

Many of us throw a piece of paper, tissues, or other small items into the toilet, instead of a wastebasket. Place a wastebasket next to your toilet to avoid this situation in the future.

#### Install low flow showerheads and faucet aerators

Look for ones that use no more than 2.5 gallons per minute at maximum flow (for showerheads) and 2.2 gallons per minute maximum flow (for faucets).

### **Kitchen and Laundry**

#### Run the dishwasher and washing machine only when full

Dishwashers and washing machines use a tremendous amount of water. Practice wise water techniques by making the most of the water that you use.

#### Use the garbage disposal less often to conserve water

We usually let the water run while we dispose of food down the dishwasher. Use it only when necessary.

#### Fill the sink with water to pre-rinse dishes before putting them in the dishwasher

This is a great way to conserve water. You are not only saving water by eliminating the process of rinsing dishes before you place them in the dishwasher but also reducing the load on your dishwasher (and perhaps preventing dishes from being washed again).

#### **For additional information please visit the following web sites:**

Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Useful Links  
<http://www.mwcog.org/dep/water/supply/links.htm>

American Water Works Association  
<http://www.awwa.org/>



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Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection  
<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/subject/hotopics/drought/SavingWater.htm>

Living Wise – Learning to be Water Wise  
<http://www.getwise.org/>