

water, water, everywhere

It's easy to think that we have an unlimited resource of fresh water, but this is not the case. Increasingly, urban areas are facing water shortages. Fortunately, reducing your demand for water is easy.

Our lifestyle is synonymous with pure water. We have mile upon mile of pristine beaches, tranquil lakes and rushing rivers. Plenty of the stuff falls from the sky at this time of the year, too. However, as pure water becomes scarce around the world, we need to think about water resources for future generations.

While our access to fresh water is enviable, there are regions in the country where, in the drier months, demand outstrips supply. Water is required by many different sectors – households, agriculture, hydro-electricity generators and tourism – and it's hard to judge whose needs are greater.

Given that, here are a few simple tips to help you save water around the home. And, as many councils charge for water use, saving water should also mean saving money. Mulching the garden and taking shorter showers

all adds up in dollars and cents. And not just on your water bill, either: With everyone using a little less water, councils save on wear and tear on their treatment plants, pumps and pipes, and can delay building new dams.

At home, bathrooms and toilets use the most water, so it's here we can expect to make the most savings. Mains pressure delivers between six and 24 litres of water a minute, yet research shows that nine litres a minute is perfectly sufficient. To save water, simply don't turn the tap on fully, or you can install flow restrictors or low-flow fittings. Don't confuse flow with pressure, though – you can still have fantastic water pressure while using less water.

The average shower is about 12 minutes long. Shorten your shower to eight minutes and you'll save thousands of litres of water a year. And, as it takes about 150 litres of water to fill your bath, opt for the shorter shower as often as possible



– you’ll also save on your water heating bill! And if you leave the tap running while you brush your teeth in the morning and evening, you’re wasting more 20,000 litres a year – that’s enough to fill a swimming pool.

A household of three flushes another 60,000 litres of water down the toilet a year. You can cut this dramatically simply by installing a flush control device, or putting a brick or a couple of plastic bottles of water in your cistern. Toilets are also prone to leaking, with litres of water disappearing without you realising it. To check if your toilet is at fault, put a few drops of food colouring into the cistern. If coloured water appears in the bowl before you flush, you have a leak to fix.

The laundry is another big water user. When putting a load in the washing machine, make sure it’s a full load or adjust the water level to suit (this applies to dishwashers, too). If you’re in the market for a new appliance, do a little research to find a model that is water-efficient. For example, the Electrolux jetsystem sprays water and detergent on your clothes rather than filling the machine up from the bottom, using less water.

Out in the garden, use the hose or sprinkler early in the morning or late in the evening – this way you lose less water to evaporation through heat and wind, and leave more for the plants. Mulch your garden well, too. This keeps moisture in the soil and – as an added bonus – keeps the weeds down.

As well as checking for leaks in taps and hoses, try not to leave the hose running – this can waste up to 400 litres of water an hour. If you’re using a sprinkler, set it on a timer, so you don’t have to remember to turn it off. And while it’s going, make sure you’re watering gardens and lawns, not paths and driveways.

Of course, for maximum economy and sustainability, you could consider putting in a rainwater tank to supply you with free water. They’re easy to install and relatively inexpensive. You’ll also be easing pressure on the stormwater system, as water from your roof goes into your tank and not down the drain. Rainwater is ideal for the garden, laundry and toilet, and if treated or purified, for drinking and other household uses.

See – there are opportunities inside and out for making the most of the wet stuff. For more information and handy tips on saving water, visit www.smarterhomes.org.nz/water. **H**