

April is Water Conservation Month

We've all heard the saying "April Showers bring May Flowers." But in sunny Florida, that's not always the case. In fact, we don't usually start getting the heavy rains until summer! Spring time may be an extra dry period and we all need to pitch in and save water in every way possible. With summer around the corner and visions of swimming pools filled with glimmering water sparkling in the sun and sprinklers going full throttle soaking our thirsty lawns, it's easy to get carried away with the wet stuff. But conservation isn't as tough as you might think and just a few small steps we can all take will make a huge difference. After all, April is Water Conservation Month, so let's all take the challenge and see how much water we can save.

In this day and age, water conservation is more important than ever. So much so that the Legislature has designated April as Water Conservation Month because "this is the time of year when water needs are most acute and temperatures begin to rise."

According to South Florida Water Management District, "Floridians consume more than 7.9 billion gallons of fresh water each day, with more than 90 percent of it supplied by underground aquifers. We are experiencing the third driest-dry season since recordkeeping began in 1932, with a rainfall deficit of 8.27 inches as of March's end. Dry conditions are expected to continue."

Many experts believe that the Floridan Aquifer, which supplies almost all of our drinking water, is incapable of sustaining the fast paced growth of our state. Conservation is the most cost effective and easiest way to overcome this issue. It is very expensive to use other water sources and bring them up to drinking water standards.

There are many ways that we can conserve water and not be inconvenienced. Low-flow showerheads are a great way to start. In fact, the Southwest Florida Water Management District has awarded a grant to the Highlands Soil & Water Conservation District to purchase these devices. They will be given away to citizens who bring in their old high-flow models at events that are forthcoming. These low-flow devices can cut your shower water usage by about two-thirds and you probably won't even notice any difference. Watch your local papers for information about give-a-way days!

Another way to conserve water is to capture it. That's right, I did say capture! During a typical rain storm that produces one inch of rain in a 24 hour period, approximately 700 gallons of water will run off your roof. If you have a rain barrel, you could collect that water and use it to water plants, saving plenty of water and money on your utility bill! Rain barrels are inexpensive and no trouble. They just sit there and capture water. You can purchase one at your local County Extension Office located at the Bert J. Harris Agricultural Center in Sebring for a very small amount of money.

Now here is an unpopular subject, but we all need to follow the water restrictions! It is estimated that over 50 percent of residential water is used for irrigation purposes. Everyone wants a beautiful, lush, green lawn, but there are ways you can conserve and still have one. Never water between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. This is the hottest part of the day and most of the water will

simply evaporate anyway. In the winter months between December and February, the grass is dormant so you don't need to water it as often. Once every two weeks is usually sufficient. When we do get those heavy rains, turn off your sprinkler system! No need for overkill. Make sure your irrigation system is in top shape by having it inspected or checking it out yourself. If a sprinkler is aimed toward the driveway or road, change the position and water the grass instead. If you have a leak or other water wasting issue, get it fixed. Not only will you save water, but your bill will be less.

And if you're like me, you don't water your lawn and have the ugliest yard in the neighborhood because you don't want to use up all that precious liquid. There are still ways to save! If you have kids, you know they love to keep that faucet running when they're in the bathroom. Don't allow it; turn the water off when brushing teeth, washing the face and hands. Wet it, turn it off, lather and turn it back on when ready to rinse! Once they get used to it, it will become a good habit! Compost, instead of using the garbage disposal, take that gross organic waste and compost it; your plants will love it! Make sure you use full loads when washing dishes or laundry. Don't flush trash like tissues down the toilet; use the garbage can. Don't use a hose on your driveway; sweep it off with a broom.

You can find a wealth of water saving techniques on the Internet. It is important that we conserve water all year round, not just in April. We do have a limited water supply and H₂O is not a renewable resource. Our future generations are depending on us!

Southwest Florida Water Management's Lawn Watering Schedule and Times

- Lawn watering is limited to twice per week.
- Lawn watering days and times are as follows unless your city or county has a different schedule or stricter hours in effect:
 - Even addresses may water on Thursday and/or Sunday before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
 - Odd addresses may water on Wednesday and/or Saturday before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
 - Locations without a discernable address, such as rights-of-way and other common areas inside a subdivision, may water on Tuesday and/or Friday before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.