

# Helpful Hints - Water

by Melissa Glen

Water is a very precious natural resource. Australia is the driest inhabited continent, with 70% of our land consisting of desert or semi-desert, and yet we are one of the biggest consumers per person of water on the planet.

It is important to adopt sustainable practices, to think beyond our direct usage of water and also consider the water that goes into growing, processing and transporting the products we buy (embodied water). For example, it is estimated that it takes:

- 1000 litres of freshwater to produce 1 litre of milk
- 3000 litres of freshwater to produce 1 kilo of rice
- 16000 litres of freshwater to produce 1 kilo of beef

Your water footprint is the total volume of fresh water used to produce goods and services consumed, and it can be calculated at [www.waterfootprint.org](http://www.waterfootprint.org) .

## Be Water Wise

Often simple changes to your everyday lifestyle can make huge differences to your annual water usage, this not only helps conserve a valuable natural resource but it also saves you money in the long-run.

- **Water rating labels** - The National Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Scheme helps to make informed decisions about the most water-efficient products on the market by giving them a rating of one through to six. With six being the most efficient, a minimum three-star rating is advisable. You can search for the most water efficient products and look at their water consumption before purchasing at [www.waterrating.gov.au](http://www.waterrating.gov.au) .
- **Install aerators on taps** - Aerators or flow-control valves can be purchased from hardware stores and are easy to install yourself. They reduce water flow without reducing water pressure and can cut water usage from taps by half.
- **Fix any leaks** - Slow dripping taps can waste up to 20,000 litres of water a year! It's worth replacing that washer or tightening the connection when you think about the long term water wastage and cost. To check if you have any leaks, turn off all water sources in your house and then go and look at the water metre. If the metre is still moving, you have a leak somewhere and will need to find it.
- **Re-using grey water** – Water that is discharged from showers, washing machines and dishwasher can be re-used in other areas throughout your home. Grey water recycling can be as simple as buckets in the shower/kitchen or a more elaborate set-up that requires council approval. Grey water contains bacteria, organic matter, detergents, soaps and salt, so extreme care needs to be taken to ensure there is no possibility of it being consumed or coming into direct contact with people or pets.

## Household water saving tips:

### In the bathroom

About 40% of water use in the average home is in the bathroom.

- Ⓢ Don't leave the tap running whilst brushing your teeth, this can save up to 4000 litres per year.
- Ⓢ Switch to a water saving showerhead and halve your water usage.
- Ⓢ Install a timer in the shower and spend only 5 minutes in there, 20 litres can be saved for every minute less in the shower.
- Ⓢ Put a bucket in the shower to capture the water before it heats up, this excess water can be used on the garden or elsewhere in the household.
- Ⓢ Put a plug in and fill the sink up a little to wash your face or shave instead of having continuous running water.
- Ⓢ Fill the bath only half or three quarters, you can save up to 100 litres.
- Ⓢ Utilise the single flush on dual flush toilet systems, or if you have an older style toilet you can fill a couple of water bottles and sit them in the cistern to take up a bit of the space. Less water will then be needed to fill up the cistern after each flush.

### In the kitchen

About 10% of our water usage is in the kitchen.

- Ⓢ When washing dishes by hand, half fill the second sink for rinsing; if no second sink is available a small amount of hot water from the kettle could be used.
- Ⓢ Use only small amounts of a biodegradable detergent so there is less to rinse off at the end.
- Ⓢ Only boil the amount of water you will need to use immediately from the kettle, this saves water and electricity.
- Ⓢ Use a half-full sink or bowl of water to rinse vegetables.
- Ⓢ Keep the lid on the saucepan to boil water.
- Ⓢ Reuse cooking water once it's cooled, in the garden for example.
- Ⓢ Make sure your water thermostat is not set too high.
- Ⓢ Hand washing dishes instead of using the dishwasher for small loads can save water, or don't start the dishwasher load until it is full.
- Ⓢ Keep a water bottle in the fridge for cool water during summer, a much better option than waiting for the warmer water in the pipes to run through.

### In the laundry

Up to 20% of total water usage in the home is in the laundry.

- Ⓢ Wait until you have a full load to do washing, otherwise washing a few number of items by hand can save huge amounts of water and also electricity costs.
- Ⓢ Consider updating older model machines as they use more water per load.
- Ⓢ Use the minimal amount of detergent and make sure it's biodegradable
- Ⓢ If you are doing a few loads, use the sud-saver option if your machine has it
- Ⓢ Capture the water from you washing machines rinse cycle with a bucket and use on the garden (avoiding any vegies you plan on eating raw)

## **Outdoors**

- ④ Use a broom to sweep outdoor driveways and areas instead of a hose or a garden blower.
- ④ Wash your car or boat on the lawn or bare ground so the water runs into the soil and use a bucket.
- ④ Water your garden early in the morning or at night when less water will be lost through evaporation.
- ④ Mulch around plants to save water, prevent evaporation and stop weed growth
- ④ Water the roots of the plant not the leaves.
- ④ Plant at appropriate times of the year when conditions are right for suitable growth.

*(Material for this article sourced from "A Lighter Footprint" by Angela Crocombe)*