



Water and Energy

Conservation Guide


When the Central Texas heat is on, the electricity and water bills rise to the occasion. While fresh water and energy are renewable resources, the world's supply is decreasing faster than it can be replenished. During the warm season months in Texas, it's important to be conservative in your water and energy use. When everyone overuses the resources at once, blackouts and water shortages occur. When you save water and energy, you save money on your utility bills too. Use these tips to conserve water and energy in and around your home. Also, use this guide as a tool for adding value to your home now and in the future.

Be Water Smart While We're Water Short

Tips for Conserving Water Outdoors

Adjust sprinklers so only your lawn is watered and not the house, sidewalk, or street.

- ▶ Install covers on pools and spas and check for leaks around your pumps. If you don't cover it, hundreds of gallons of water per month can be lost due to evaporation.
- ▶ Mulch around plants to retain moisture and save water, time and money.

 If installing a lawn or other plants, select a turf mix or blend that matches your climate and site conditions. For water conservation landscaping ideas visit austintexas.gov/department/grow-green.

- ▶ Washing a car at home uses about 150 gallons of water. Consider washing less frequently or use a commercial car wash that recycles water or uses water conservation methods to get the job done.

Stick to a watering schedule.

- ▶ Water your lawn and garden in the morning or evening when temperatures are cooler to minimize evaporation.
- ▶ Use water based on city ordinances to reduce usage and avoid fines. For water use stages and more information, visit your city utilities website:

Austin: austintexas.gov/department/water-conservation

Bastrop: cityofbastrop.org

Buda: ci.buda.tx.us/232/water-conservation

Cedar Park: cedarparktexas.gov

Dripping Springs: drippingspringswater.com

Georgetown: gus.georgetown.org/water

Hutto: huttotx.gov

Kyle: cityofkyle.com/utilitybilling

Lago Vista: lagovistatexas.org

Leander: leandertx.gov/utilities

Pflugerville: utilitybilling.pflugervilletx.gov

Round Rock: roundrocktexas.gov

San Marcos: sanmarcostx.gov

Wimberley: cityofwimberley.com

When watering your plants:

- ▶ Water only when necessary. More plants die from overwatering than from underwatering.
- ▶ Water your plants deeply but less frequently to encourage deep root growth and drought tolerance.
- ▶ When the kids want to cool off, use the sprinkler in an area where your lawn needs it the most.


Personal Water Footprint Calculator


Watercalculator.org features a tool to help you define your personal water footprint. Their water calculator allows you to input personal information about your household water use and gives you a score.


Go to watercalculator.org to find out yours!

Tips for Conserving Water in the Home

- ▶ Run your clothes washer and dishwasher only when they are full and match the water amount to the size of load. You can save up to 1,000 gallons a month.
- ▶ Consider reusing your towels and clothes more than once between washes. Ask yourself if the towel or garment is truly dirty enough to wash or could it be reused or reworn? Use your best judgement, of course.
- ▶ Use the garbage disposal sparingly. Compost vegetable food waste instead and save gallons every time.
- ▶ Monitor your water bill for unusually high use. Your bill and water meter are tools that can help you discover leaks.
- ▶ Turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shaving at the sink and save a possible 25 gallons a month.
- ▶ Shower Power: it takes about 70 gallons of water to fill a bathtub, so showers are generally the more water efficient way to bathe. If you shorten your shower by a minute or two, you'll save up to 150 gallons per month. Every minute counts!

 Upgrade to a low-flow shower head or install a water flow restrictor in your already-installed shower head. You can save 15 gallons of water during a 10-minute shower.

 Upgrade and use energy efficient appliances. For example, Energy Star dishwashers use about 4 gallons of water per load, and even standard machines use only about 6 gallons. Hand washing generally uses about 20 gallons of water each time.

 Upgrade older toilets with water efficient models. All of those flushes can add up to nearly 20 gallons a day down the toilet. Standard toilets use close to 3.5 gallons a flush - try retrofitting or filling your tank with something that will displace some of that water, such as a brick.

Creative Water Collection Ideas

- ▶ Water used for rinsing fruits and vegetables or leftovers from cooking can be reused to water houseplants.
- ▶ When giving your pets fresh water, don't let the old water go to waste. Water the surrounding plants with it.

Harvest Rainwater

- ▶ Use your roof and gutters to harvest rainwater - direct the water from the gutters into storage barrels. For an extra attractive version, try using a Japanese rain chain to direct the water spilled from your roof into a ceramic or stoneware pot beneath. For more information, visit: rainchains.com.
- ▶ Create a raingarden. It prevents flooding and erosion and turns stormwater problems into a water supply. They are usually planted with native vegetation that is hardy and attractive. For more information about raingardens, visit: rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu/raingardens

Stay Cool and Avoid Power Outages Through Energy Conservation

Bright Ideas to Reduce Your Summertime Electricity Bill

According to Austin Energy, between 60-70% of the average summertime power bill in Central Texas is due to air conditioning alone. Use these tips to keep cool and save your pocketbook during the warm season.

Maintain your current A/C system.

- ▶ Change air filters every month during the summer. A dirty filter makes your A/C run longer than necessary. A high-rated pleated filter is up to 90% more efficient than an inexpensive mesh filter.
- ▶ Seal ductwork leaks in your attic. The average older home loses 27% or more of cooling and heating due to leaking ducts.
- ▶ Caulk and weather strip any gaps in your home's thermal envelope – exterior walls, windows, doors, the roof and floors.

Limit the heat generated within the home.

- ▶ Keep lights off whenever possible. The standard light bulb gives off 90% heat and 10% light.
- ▶ Keep curtains and blinds drawn on windows getting hit by direct sunlight. Direct sunlight shining into a room can raise the temperature five degrees or more.

Upgrade to a programmable thermostat. Raise the temperature when you are gone and cool down your house before you return. Set your A/C thermostat at 78 degrees or higher when possible. Every degree higher can save up to \$90 a summer.

- ▶ Iron, cook, and wash and dry clothes in the morning or later in the evening, when the weather is naturally cooler.
- ▶ Washing clothes in cold water rather than hot can save \$100 or more a year in energy use.
- ▶ Setting your water heater temperature lower than 120 degrees will save about \$45 a year, on average.
- ▶ Watch out for "Phantom Power" – it accounts for as much as 10% of home energy use. Unplug cell phone chargers, TVs, computers and other electrical devices, which are using power even when turned off.
- ▶ When possible, reduce the number of times you come in and out of entry doors, which brings in hot air and lets cool air out.
- ▶ Use ceiling, counter and floor fans. Fans blowing directly on you will make you feel 2-4 degrees cooler.

Affordable Upgrades for a More Energy Efficient Home

Save money and improve home performance using effective strategy. First, target your home's envelope: walls, attic, windows and doors. Then, improve the energy efficiency of systems, such as heating, cooling, lighting and appliances. Schedule an energy audit for more expert advice on your home as a whole. To access a list of certified ECAD auditors in your area, visit bit.ly/2vnuSjH.

Upgrade to an energy efficient A/C system.

Replace an old air conditioner with a high efficiency unit. New A/Cs use up to 30-50% less electricity than a 15 year-old model.

Make sure your walls and attic are well insulated.

Effective insulation slows the rate that heat flows out of the house in winter or into the house in summer, so less energy is required to heat or cool the house.

Upgrade or replace windows.

According to energystar.gov, replacing windows will save 7-24% of your heating and A/C bills.

Another idea is to install solar screens on windows hit by direct sunlight. Solar screens block out 60-70% of heat before it can enter the house.


Plant shade trees and shrubs around your house.


- ▶ In the summer, the foliage blocks infrared radiation that would warm the house, while in the winter, the bare branches let this radiation come through.

Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).

- ▶ CFLs can save 75% of the electricity used by incandescents. Most people don't know that the electricity to run a light bulb costs much more than the bulb itself. A new CFL costs around two dollars, but it lasts 10,000 hours and uses only about 27 watts to generate as much light as a 50 cent, 100-watt incandescent bulb that only lasts 1,000 hours.

Water & Energy Conservation Icon Key

 Customers of Austin Water or a qualifying water provider can receive rebates and incentives for implementing water-conserving equipment or resources. For more information, visit: austintexas.gov/department/rebates-tools-and-programs.

 There are rebates available through Austin Energy for the purchase or installation of energy efficient equipment. For more information, visit: savings.austinenergy.com/rebates.

Sources include:

U.S. Green Building Council's Green Home Guide, greenhomeguide.com
Austin Energy, austinenergy.com

