

Water Conservation Tips for Fairhope Residents and Business Owners

The Mobile Bay area typically receives over 60" of rainfall each year. This abundance means we don't usually think about water efficiency. But the landscape is changing. Development intensity, population growth, and periodic droughts place high demands on our municipal water system.

On June 7, 2023, water use in the City of Fairhope reached 80% of system capacity for seven days. This triggered a water alert, and the city is asking customers to voluntarily conserve water to avoid mandatory restrictions.

This also happened in June 2022. Thankfully, our community came together, reduced water use, and mandatory restrictions were not required. However, these situations highlight a need to be more proactive with water conservation. Here are some proven ways we can reduce water waste at our homes and businesses.

Outside

The majority of residential outdoor water use is due to landscape irrigation. Over half of this is wasted, carried away by wind, evaporation, or runoff. To address this, we can use sustainable yard practices to reduce water needs, then meet the remaining needs in the most efficient way possible.

Plants and Trees

- **Leave a portion of your lot undisturbed and in a natural state.** Plants and trees that are established don't need irrigation. Natural areas also help maintain healthy soils, shade, and habitat.
- **Use trees to shade >30% of your landscaped area at maturity.** Shading substantially reduces evapotranspiration.
- **Get a soil test and amend if necessary.** Use organic soil amendments to improve soil health. Healthy soil is better at absorbing and managing water and other nutrients that help plants thrive.
- **Limit turf grass area.** Turf grass needs frequent watering to become established and during droughts. It requires regular mowing and is often treated with fertilizer and pesticides that are detrimental to the larger ecosystem. Consider drought tolerant turf grass or an alternative ground cover for lawn areas and limit overall lawn area as much as possible.
- **Cut your lawn at the highest recommended length.** This will shade the ground and reduce evaporation.
- **Select a diverse array of plants for your landscape.** Species diversity can improve soil health. Healthy soil is better at absorbing and managing water.
- **Prioritize native species and avoid invasive exotic plants.** Native species are accustomed to our climate, so they typically do not need additional irrigation once established.
- **Group landscape plants based on watering needs.** This practice, known as hydrozoning, helps plants stay healthy while reducing overall water use.

Irrigation

- **Avoid installing permanent irrigation.** Instead, use sprinklers or drip lines temporarily during droughts or to establish new plants.
- **Collect rainwater in rain barrels or cisterns to use for irrigation.** There are plenty of DIY options, or purchase a system from a local home improvement or hardware store.
- **Use HVAC condensate to water plants.** Condensate from your HVAC system is simply distilled water. Use a container to collect it, or direct it toward a rain barrel or landscape bed.
- **Water plants early in the morning.** Avoid watering at night and during the hottest part of the day.

- **Irrigate only when your lawn shows you it's needed.** Are the blades folding into a v-shape? Does the color of your lawn appear pale? Are footprints visible when you walk across the lawn? These are all signs that water is needed.
- **Measure the amount of water the lawn is receiving.** Use straight sided cans or other small containers to monitor this. Providing ½"-¾" of water promotes deep root growth, allowing you to water less often.
- **Water less in winter months.** In the winter, plants go dormant. This means their metabolism slows down significantly, and they need less water.
- **If you have permanent irrigation, consider:**
 - Drip irrigation instead of sprinkler heads.
 - Microirrigation in landscape beds and narrow areas. This includes drip, subsurface, bubblers and microspray irrigation.
 - Subsurface drip for all turf grass areas.
 - Smart controllers that adjust flow based on weather or soil moisture.
 - Creating zones to allow watering needs to match plant needs.
 - Pressure regulation at the head or valve.
 - Check valves in low areas. Water pressure often builds in these locations, causing water to leak from heads after valves are closed.
 - A leak detection or flow sensing system.
 - Locating sprinklers and emitters >2 feet from structures and impervious surfaces like roads and paved driveways.
 - Look for the WaterSense label on products for your irrigation system.

Inside

Bathrooms are the biggest source of water use in most homes, but small adjustments to all interior water use can yield big savings while conserving our community's natural resources.

- **Install WaterSense labeled showerheads, faucets, and toilets.** These fixtures use up to 30% less water than standard fixtures. Alternatively, look for fixtures that meet these flow rates:
 - ≤1.5 gallons per minute bathroom faucet
 - ≤1.8 gallons per minute kitchen faucet
 - ≤2.0 gallons per minute showerhead
 - ≤1.28 gallons per flush toilet
- **Add aerators to faucets.** These inexpensive add-ons increase water pressure and conserve water.
- **Use a water leak monitoring system.** From DIY sensors to professionally-installed systems with integrated shut-off valves, a range of options are available to monitor water usage.
- **Use compact water line distribution.** In new construction or renovation projects, limit the length of water lines as much as possible.
- **Select dishwashers and clothes washers that are Energy Star labeled.** These products help you save water and energy.

Sources:

[2020 National Green Building Standard](#)

[EPA WaterSense](#)

[Florida Green Building Standard](#)

[Florida Water Star](#)

[Florida Friendly Landscaping](#)

[Alabama Cooperative Extension Service](#)