



University of Missouri

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Around the Columns

Expert encourages water conservation

Missourians need to take water conservation seriously now — before water shortages become a serious problem.

That's the word from Bob Broz, water quality program coordinator for [University of Missouri Extension](#). Like much of the country, he says, Missouri is experiencing groundwater shortages. This is troubling for a state that averages a plentiful 30 to 50 inches of rain a year.

The shortages are caused by increases in population, water-intensive industries and unusual drought, Broz says. He projects that the demand for water will soar.

Although industry can help the state's economy flourish, it also taxes water supplies. Food and grain processing plants, for example, guzzle more than a million gallons of water a day. Such concentrated demand draws on the water table in a large radius and could drain shallow residential wells that supply homes.

Individuals also need to take responsibility. "We are a society of consumers," Broz says. "Water is something we've always taken for granted."

Missourians could take conservation cues from drought-prone states. Broz cites friends from Colorado who plug their tub when they shower and scoop the sudsy water into their toilet tank for flushing.

Missouri has no laws controlling water use, unlike some neighboring states, but that may soon change.

In the meantime, Broz hopes Missourians will adopt conservation techniques that fit their lifestyles. Even small changes can multiply into huge benefits when many people take action. "It's never too early to start conserving."

Conservation Tips

Simple actions can reduce the amount of water we use. Some examples follow.

In the house:




- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.
- Install low-flow showerheads.
- Choose Energy Star-rated appliances. An instant hot-water heater in the kitchen can save water and help reduce water heating costs.
- Replace pre-1992 toilets, the largest indoor water hogs, with 1.6-gallon-per-flush models.
- Limit showers to five minutes, or take shallow baths, which use much less water.
- Start a compost pile for food scraps instead of using a garbage disposal.

In the yard:

- Reduce water by planting native, drought-resistant plants suited to Missouri's climate, such as those available at [Missouri Wildflowers Nursery](#) outside Jefferson City, Mo.
- Water the yard early in the day when evaporation is lowest or replace grass with native plants that don't need watering. Instead of a Bradford pear tree, plant a black gum, known for its brilliant fall colors. Or try flowers and grasses like aromatic aster, showy goldenrod, little bluestem, gray-head coneflower and Missouri black-eyed Susan.
- Adjust sprinklers to water the lawn, not the driveway.
- Use a broom instead of hose to clean pavement.
- Clip the grass to three inches or taller. Taller grass shades the roots, reducing evaporation and allowing roots to grow deeper and stronger.
- Install rain barrels. At Broz's house, four rain barrels, which collect about 400 gallons of water for every inch of rain, supply ample water for gardening.

The [GrowNative](#) program has more tips.

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