

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Easy come, easy go. And that's the trouble. The human race puts far less value upon easily obtainable resources than on those for which we labor long and hard. Even though our very lives depend on a resource that comes easily to hand, those we deem most precious are the ones that are difficult to wrest from the earth even though we can survive very well without them, generation after generation, forever.

If someone offered you a bucket of sparkling diamonds or a bucket of clear pure water, which would you choose? The diamonds, right? Only if you were terribly thirsty would the water be your choice. Yet you can survive without diamonds and your life depends on water.

Most people, if they think of it at all, view the water supply as endless. Fresh, potable water bubbles forth from our faucets at a touch and seems to come from a bottomless well.

But is the well as bottomless as it's often assumed to be? "For one person, the typical five gallon flush contaminates about 13,000 gallons of fresh water to move a mere 165 gallons of body wastes every year."-- Goodbye to the Flush Toilet, by Carol Hopping Stoner (Rodale Press). Somebody's finally figured that out.

And water flushed down the toilet isn't the only way water is run away, of course. The typical American family-of-four uses over 250 gallons of water every day. Fifteen gallons for washing dishes, twelve for cooking and drinking, thirty-five for laundry, eighty for bathing, a hundred for the toilet, and thirteen just to wash four pairs of hands several times a day. That adds up to close to 100,000 gallons of water a year.

As long as good quality water continues to be available in apparently unlimited supply, we'll continue to waste it, but as pollution increases, the degree of treatment to maintain water quality also increases.

Cape Codders may not yet think much about it, but excessive water consumption costs us money in higher water rates and mounting energy costs. By making a conscious effort to reduce water consumption most families could save over \$50 a year in water bills.

Water, far from being free for the asking at the twist of a spigot, begins its uneconomic journey through the drains and flushes good dollars from the pocketbooks of taxpayers.

Not only are water rates rising just as other expenses are, but Cape water districts are recognizing that the supplies of fresh water are not limitless. New wells are plugged into the systems each year as woodlands the length and breadth of the Cape give way to housing developments, as trees and underbrush fall to bulldozers, as roads, driveways and concrete foundations replace the fields and forests of our narrow land.

Black-topped shopping malls sprawl over wide acreages. Water, falling from the skies onto roads and parking areas,

drains into storm sewers, and instead of the water seeping down through the sandy soil to replenish the wells, it is syphoned to the ocean or through the municipal sewer systems.

It takes effort, energy and expense to keep an adequate supply of good water flowing from the faucets in our homes and to dispose of the resulting waste. The less we use, the more effort, energy and expense we save; the smaller the volume of wastes produced, the less it costs for treatment. In densely populated areas of the Cape where sewage treatment plants, cesspools and septic tanks are already overloaded, a reduction in wastewater volume would lessen pollution significantly.

Unlike other conservation efforts such as saving electrical energy or fuel, cutting down water use requires no great changes in our life-styles or personal habits; only small changes need be made.

Unlike expensive auto-emission controls, the price of the simplest water conservation measures is nil; even the more expensive methods easily pay for themselves over time.

Saving money on water rates and on the costs of heating water at your house might make sense if you were to see the difference in the bills you pay. To prove it can make a difference, you'll need to test it yourself and compare one year's bills with another's.

One of the first steps you can take is to have leaky faucets and toilets repaired. To make sure your toilet doesn't leak, pour a few drops of food coloring into the tank. If the colored water shows up in the bowl without flushing, your toilet is leaking. Have it fixed immediately.

Leaking faucets, no matter how slow the drippety-drip, drain dollars from your wallet. A slow drip wastes approximately 170 gallons of water a day at a normal household pressure of 40 pounds. A fast drip allows 970 gallons a day to run down the drain. One 1/8-inch opening can deliver 3,600 gallons of water in 24 hours.

What else can be done to save water? There are several ways. If you try them all, you'll be amazed at the savings. If you try only a few, you'll notice a small but important difference in consumption and costs.

Don't let faucets run for washing or rinsing dishes. Fill a basin with water, or use the sink stopper.

For men only: brush your teeth before shaving, using the cold water in the supply line instead of running it down the drain while waiting for hot shaving water. And fill the wash bowl to rinse your razor rather than running the hot tap while you shave. Or use an electric razor. It pulls less electricity than the energy burned to heat your shaving water.

Use a glass of water to rinse your mouth after brushing your teeth. And brush with the tap closed. The sound of running water does nothing to help get your teeth clean.

Keep drinking water in a bottle in the refrigerator to avoid running a couple of gallons down the sink for a cold drink.

Unless necessary, don't prewash dishes for automatic dishwashing.

Compost your vegetable peelings, or put them in the garbage can instead of flushing them through the disposal or garbage grinder.

When handwashing anything, scrub with a brush or your hands to dislodge particles of dirt rather than relying on the force of running water to do the job.

When making tea or coffee, draw only the quantity of water you'll need. It will heat faster, save fuel as well as water, and you can always heat another cupful if you need it.

Allow small children to bathe together in one tubful of water. Install pressure-reducing valves in your showerheads; showers use less water than tub-baths.

When doing a load of laundry be sure you have a full tub. If you're putting through your automatic washer only a small load, set the water level switch at half-full, or stand by to reset the dial when the tub is adequately full to do the job. Remember to repeat the performance for the rinse cycle.

Automatic dishwashers may be among housewives' favorite appliances, but they're extravagant consumers of water, often pumping ten gallons a load. If dishwashers are loaded to capacity for each use, worthwhile water savings can be realized. Save electricity, too, by turning the machine off after the last rinse and letting the dishes air dry.

Someday water may become so precious we'll replace the flush toilet with the Clivus Multrum and save 100 gallons of water per day per person to protect the earth's remaining fresh water resources from sewage pollution. Abusrd? Impossible? No, not at all improbable.

When pure water's not there any more at the flick of a finger, we'll suddenly wake up to the fact we can't live without it. It'll be as precious, even more precious, than diamonds.

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