

# Amid snarks and shaming, five tips to save water at home

By Mark Grossi  
mgrossi@fresnobee.com

Gray is the new green. And a lot of readers apparently are doing more than counting to two.

That's water conservation jargon. I ran across it while reading suggestions you folks sent me after I asked for ideas on saving water last week. Drought snarking and shaming continues, too. It's a defining feature of the intense California drought.

But about three dozen of you focused on saving water at home. My top five list is below.

The gray-green slogan is about recycling household water from showers, washing machines, sinks and other household sources that don't involve the toilet.

What about counting to two? Fresno asks you to water twice a week. For even-numbered addresses, it's Sundays and Wednesdays. For odd-numbered, it's Tuesdays and Saturdays. One. Two. Done. You can save a lot of water just doing that.

I checked with the city about outdoor watering. You might be surprised that there are a few thousand water customers in Fresno who are not counting to two. The city is getting around to them with notices and eventually citations.

Onward to a few ideas.

George Folsom of Fresno counts to two in a smart way. He changed to low-flow sprinkler heads and installed a smart Internet-based programmer to help avoid runoff.

His water use in May dropped by half compared to 2013 — which is the year the state uses as a baseline to enforce Fresno's mandatory 28% reduction this year ordered by Gov. Jerry Brown.

Jennifer Rodriguez bought a pack of disposable diapers, applied water to them and mixed the gel into the soil of her potted plants.

"The dirt stays moist and only needs water once a week," she wrote.

Stephanie Frederick heats water in the microwave for small cleanups in the kitchen, thus avoiding water loss that would happen if she turned on the faucet and waited for the water to warm up.

Albert Steele says he captures gallons of water from air-conditioning condensate.

"All you need is a bucket," he wrote. "Set it under the condensate discharge pipe."

Arlyn Presley is 86 years old, so it's hard to catch water in a bucket while she's showering, she says. But Arlyn captures the warm-up water and pours it into her washing machine.

She also puts a square pan in the kitchen sink to catch water whenever she's rinsing off dishes or whatever.

Tom and Judy Gibbons offer advice about buckets to capture water:

"Try Lowe's or Home Depot. Go into the paint department and go to the shelves where they supply 'paint mixing buckets.' These range from small five-quart and up.

“Also, do folks modify their washing machines discharge hose to irrigate with the water from the washing machine? Simple enough to connect the machine discharge hose to go outside, rather than it just dumping down the drain.”

The shower, washing machine, dishwasher and rinse water in the kitchen sink are all part of the “gray is the new green” idea — reusing your household water. It’s water that has not gone through the toilet.

California has standards for commercial and residential buildings, but it’s up to the local governments to enforce them through permits. Fresno does not issue such permits, nor does it cruise the city looking for such violations.

Now for the Top 5, which are basically categories that many readers suggested:

1. Put the bucket on your list. Capture household water — like shower warmup water — and use it in the garden.
2. Count to two. Water only two days a week. Cut your watering time.
3. In the yard: Reduce turf. Increase tree canopy for more shade. Use drip irrigation. Consider drought-tolerant plants.
4. Fix leaking toilets, faucets and sprinkler valves.
5. Install low-flow shower heads, put plastic bottles in your toilet tank, install a low-flow toilet.

Mark Grossi: [\(559\) 441-6316](tel:5594416316), [@markgrossi](https://www.instagram.com/markgrossi)