

[The Bay Area is in a state of extreme drought](#). This has been the third driest "water year" on record. California cancelled its final, April 29, snow survey because so little remained. Reservoirs are low. With vegetation and soils parched, a long, fierce wildfire season seems likely. More than individual efforts will be needed to [carry California's varied, vibrant nature, population, and economy through what seems to lie ahead](#). Still, your home and business are a good place to start.

[Here are modest actions for using water responsibly long-term](#). These are likely to save significant amounts of water. Many are painless -- some even bring you [freebies](#) or savings.

Outdoors:

- **Plants:** Choose tough, drought-tolerant plants. Convert some or all lawn to a low-water garden -- surprisingly easy with sheet mulching -- or permeable decks, patios, or walkways. [EBMUD](#) and other water agencies have great free webinars, publications, and some rebates, often available even if you're not a customer. Also see the garden-related events in Events of Others, below.
- **Soil:** Help your soil absorb and hold water by using mulch and compost. There are many free or low-cost classes in this, and cities and water agencies offer bargains or freebies.
- **Watering:** Water slowly, deeply, and seldom. Make sure sprinklers aren't spraying up into hot air or out onto pavement. Consider soakers, drip, or sprinklers that sense soil moisture. Consider harvesting rainwater with cisterns or barrels, or irrigating with water from laundry, tub, or sinks. Check your water agency ([EBMUD](#) for most readers) for information and advice as well as coupons and rebates.
- **Cleaning:** Sweep rather than hose down sidewalks. Wash your car at a commercial car-wash -- they recycle. If you wash equipment outdoors, do it where water can sink in. Follow the "only rain down the storm drain" rule -- you'll cut pollution, too.

Indoors:

- [Check for and fix leaks](#) -- including at your toilet flapper and turnoff valves. You'll cut your water bill. For your system generally, see whether the meter shows water use while water is not running. EBMUD offers [free tablets](#) to check for toilet leaks.
- Appliances: Run only full loads in your washing machine and dishwasher. A new model may save you both water and energy. [Rebates may be -- or become -- available](#).
- Showers and faucets: Install a lower-flow shower head, as well as low-flow aerators ([available free](#)) on bath and kitchen faucets. Take short showers; turn water off while you brush your teeth, shave, or wash up. Fill a sink or pan to wash dishes. EBMUD will send you a [free food scraper](#) to cut pre-dishwasher rinsing.
- Toilets: How often you flush is a personal decision. But [your toilet is not a waste can](#) -- use it only for toilet paper and what comes out of you. Don't flush floss, hair, cat litter, food, butts, cotton, pads, condoms, towels, and especially not wipes -- even if these are labeled "flushable." You may save yourself a big plumbing bill! Consider a lower-flow toilet -- [today's are better and more varied than older models](#).

[Calculating your water use](#) or setting a [water-use budget](#) can help show you which actions will make the biggest differences. The Internet offers countless [tips on saving water](#). It's fun to browse and find ideas that would work for you.

Friends of Five Creeks, www.fivecreeks.org, f5creeks@gmail.com. Volunteers protecting nature for 25 years.