

Loving water: Preserve, protect and drink

BY NATE DOWNEY

Stop. Breathe. Drink a glass of water. You can't absorb mission-critical information if you're dehydrated.

The City Different happens to be four years into a drought ranging from Texas to California, but unlike other places this town already has a long history reflecting a deep respect for the elixir of life. Here, we revere rain. Pray for snow. We live in utter awe of drizzle. Jaws drop for fog, and dew is often a direct cause for celebration. We love water so much we want to squeeze it and smother it with slobbery kisses.

"We live in an environmentally conscious community that's beyond conservation," says the city of Santa Fe's water conservation manager, Laurie Trevizo. "Our respect for water is an essential part of our identity. It's not something we go and do. It's how we live."

Trevizo's right. Ours is the community that pioneered the low-flow-toilet rebate. Now, communities everywhere are following our lead. Now that almost all of those old-fashioned toilets have been replaced, we have to look for other ways to save.

Although many of my friends and colleagues are ready to make the transition to composting toilets, it's doubtful that Mayor Javier Gonzales is ready to take Santa Fe as far forward as that. Still, an excellent place to find water conservation tips is at the city's new website, www.savewatersantafe.com. There, you'll find over 50 ways to save.

Here are some of my personal favorites and don'ts for water lovers. They range from the almost mundane to the nearly revolutionary.

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INDOORS

- Most restaurant goers know that water is provided to patrons only upon request. This is a symbolic gesture designed to start a conversation about conservation. It's not really about saving water, so make sure to ask for some to stay hydrated at our altitude.

- Don't let the faucet run while you shave, wash your hands or brush your teeth.
- With the exception of underwear, reuse clothing, sheets and towels before chucking them in the wash.

- Navy showers (a brief wet-down, followed by soap-down with the water off, followed by a brief rinse) not only save water, but such a short shower also gives you more time to get out and enjoy all of our wonderful New Mexico sunshine.

- Know that rebates are available from the City of Santa Fe for high-efficiency clothes washers and high-efficiency toilets (HET). These HET porcelain goddesses are not merely "low flow" like the 1.6-gallon flushers that came in during the first wave of toilet rebates. The new ones use 1.28-gallons per flush or less.

- Institutions should convert all animals to waterless models. They work great, and they don't stink if properly maintained.

- If you've got a leak, and you don't know how to fix it, call the city at 505-955-4225. The staff will be happy to help.

- Report leaks and water waste. According to the EPA, one drip per second can waste 3,000 gallons per year. Call 505-955-4222 to report problems.

- Finally, if it's yellow, well, you know the drill. Just try not to splash, and put the seat down when you're done.

OUTDOORS

- The full Santa Fe experience requires at least a little hiking. When you go, please stay on designated trails. Healthy topsoil is extremely limited in this brittle, arid environment, and the less we stomp all over our fragile watersheds the more absorbent our soils will be and the less erosion we will cause. This translates into healthier arroyos, streams and rivers.

- If you must have a lawn, consider plastic grass. It requires no watering, weeding, aerating, fertilizing or mowing.

- The best approach to landscaping is to avoid all forms of turf and to harvest stormwater runoff from your roof and driveway. By using passive water harvesting techniques like on-

contour swales, wicks, French drains and rain gardens, you can divert this resource to the root systems of drought-tolerant trees, shrubs and perennials.

- Build a compost pile. Even though compost requires water, you'll ultimately conserve it by bringing life to the soil in your garden or landscape.

- You can also follow the steps in the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer's free online book, *Roof-Reliant Landscaping*. It's a peer-reviewed, step-by-step guide for designing and installing cistern systems for drought-tolerant landscapes that can be independent of any water source other than the sky.

- Go to www.permadesign.com and click on "Tools." You'll find a quick and easy way to estimate how much water comes off your roof in an average year.

- Contact the Water Conservation Office at 505-955-4225 for an irrigation-efficiency evaluation and rebates up to \$750.

- Recycling greywater (wastewater from bathroom sinks, showers and laundry — everything but the kitchen sink, dishwasher and toilet) in the landscape does not require a permit as long as you harvest it according to New Mexico Environment Department's guidelines at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/

- Purchase food from local farmers. Although this may seem counterintuitive, it's true. We need to encourage farmers to grow food for local human consumption and discourage the kind of industrial agriculture that has the effect of exporting "virtual" water to distant places.

- Support nonprofits like the Santa Fe Watershed Association, River Source, Amigos Bravos, WildEarth Guardians, the Quivira Coalition, Rio Grande Restoration and other groups that defend our watersheds.

- Get politically active. During the last legislative session, Senator Peter Wirth led a bipartisan effort to create transferable tax credits for cistern-system installations. The bill passed two committees (with only one "No" vote), but it never got a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee, so the measure failed. Please call finance committee chair, Senator John Arthur Smith at 575-546-4979, and ask him to support water harvesting.

These efforts create jobs, improve water quality, protect riparian habits and can make our homes and landscapes less dependent on our dwindling rivers, reservoirs and aquifers. So get involved — and don't forget to drink your water.

The Official Multitasking of 2014.

With summer on its way, remember summer water restrictions for Santa Feans are in effect from May 1 to October 31.

During the summer months, don't water your yard from 10 am to 6 pm and only water three days a week. You pick the days.

When you water when it's hot, you lose water to evaporation, some gardeners say you will burn your plants, and you could be fined by the city.

Santa Fe is entering it's fourth year of drought and forecasters say it's not going to get better. To find out more about city water rules and ways to conserve, visit savewatersantafe.com.



Conserve • Educate • Lead

City of Santa Fe Water Conservation Office 505.955.4225
savewatersantafe.com