

The Daily Courier

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Column: Take steps to reduce outdoor water use

By LESLIE HOY
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April is Water Awareness Month (WAM), officially designated via Executive Order by Arizona's Governor in 2008. The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG), along with the Arizona Department of Water Resources, Arizona Municipal Water Users Association and the WAM water conservation partners from around the state (the [City of Prescott](#) is one) invite you, your family and your neighbors to join in the celebration by learning more about what you can do to conserve and adding one or more conservation activities to what you already do.

Starting in 2008, we Prescottonians have reduced our water use every year. We've done a great job of conserving indoors by replacing old water-guzzling fixtures and appliances, fixing leaky toilets, taking shorter showers, using dishwashers instead of running water while we hand-wash the dishes, and turning off the tap while we shave and brush our teeth.

When it comes to shrinking our outdoor use, we need to do more. We can start with the "obvious and easy," move to the "takes a bit more work," and then ponder "these take all of us" (incentives and ordinances).

Obvious and easy: 1) Use a broom to clean your driveway instead of a hose; 2) Water early in the morning, preferably with a drip irrigation system, and use mulch to lessen evaporation; 3) Don't overwater plants - get a moisture meter (many are inexpensive) and learn to use it; 4) Look for and fix leaks at faucets, sprinklers, and hoses.

The City of Prescott provides detailed advice for saving water outdoors in the conservation section of the city's website: www.cityofprescott.net/services/water/conservation.php. And if you think your water bills are higher than they should be, you'll find a form there where you can request an irrigation water audit.

Takes a bit more work: 1) Remove lawn. The city offers an incentive for removing turf and according to their 2013 annual water report, they've saved "a cumulative amount of 205 acre-feet/year since 2006 by removing 434,352 sq. ft." That's a lot of savings on the turf-removers' water bills, too; 2) Investigate landscaping with native plants. Mother Nature has designed the perfect plants for our climate and using them, you can create gorgeous landscapes. Watch the video at prescottwatersmart.com. Ask for examples when you visit local garden shops. Attend CWAG's May 10 meeting (see below). Start small if you feel unsure of yourself and/or your budget is limited; 3) Consider rainwater catchment. A rainwater harvesting system can sustain your landscape all year without using groundwater from the city utility. Learn more on the city's website and at waterawarenessmonth.com.

These take all of us: Projects that will deliver large quantities of potable water, such as pipelines, will be expensive, pose environmental challenges, and require regional cooperation. At best, these projects are years off. Therefore, it's worth considering interim solutions that require smaller investments, either through incentives or somewhat more restrictive regulation.

For example, we limit outdoor watering to 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. from Apr. 15 to Nov. 1. Many water-short

communities confine watering to every other day. Native and low water use plants don't require watering every day, so we should be able to water less often than we do now.

We could do more to encourage rainwater harvesting by providing incentives at the local level and tax credits at the state level. We could do more as a community to educate homeowners and businesses about the benefits.

For homes not connected to a central sewer system, we could encourage the installation of residential and commercial gray water systems to recycle water from bathroom sinks, tubs, and showers for landscape irrigation.

We could do more to utilize storm water (when we get it) efficiently by directing it to vegetation while avoiding flooding of streets and overloading the storm sewers. With the prediction that as the climate warms, we'll get fewer and stronger storms, this will become even more important.

We could require new homes to use only native or other low water use plants for landscaping, to use rainwater harvesting systems, and prohibit using groundwater for irrigation.

There is certainly more that can be done than I have discussed above. I think of reducing outdoor water use not as punitive but as a challenge we can welcome as we enjoy our spectacular, but naturally arid surroundings. Let's go native!

Steve Miller presents "Water-Savvy Landscaping with Native Plants" on May 10. Details are at www.cwagaz.org.

Please submit questions and comments to info@cwagaz.org.

Leslie Hoy is a CWAG board member and a 15-year resident of Prescott.

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