

Take the 40 Gallon Challenge: Save Water, Save Time, Save Money!

by Paul J. Pugliese

We have the same amount of water on earth today as we did when the earth was created. Of all the earth's water, 97.5 percent is salt water located in the oceans and seas. Two percent of the earth's water is tied up in polar ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland. Less than one percent of the earth's water is fresh water available for drinking, bathing, cleaning, cooking, manufacturing and growing agricultural crops.

From a global perspective, demands for fresh water will double every 20 years as the world population continues to grow. Currently, there are more than 6.5 billion people on earth who are sharing that one percent of the earth's available fresh water. So, it goes without saying that water conservation will continue to be important not only during drought years, but will be an important way of life in the future.

We only need about 15 gallons of water per day per person for drinking, bathing and cooking, yet per capita, water consumption in the U.S. exceeds 100 gallons/day. When people hear this statistic, they often reply, "not me!" However, if you look at what this consumption involves it can add up very quickly. For example, it takes 35 gallons of water to grow, irrigate, process and cook one serving of rice (which fits in the palm of your hand). It takes 65 gallons of water to process one glass of milk. One flush of a toilet uses as much water as the average person in the developing world uses in a whole day! And on average, it takes 39,000 gallons of water to manufacture a new car. So, remember that your daily water consumption doesn't just happen at the sink or in the shower.

Recently, the Cherokee County Extension office in cooperation with the Cherokee Master Gardener Association launched a pledge campaign called the "40 Gallon Challenge." As incentive for this program, we will be giving away 50 rain barrels to Cherokee County residents over the next two years. Rain barrels are a great way to capture rainwater from down-spouts off your home roof and reuse in your landscape for watering those irreplaceable trees and shrubs. This may be the water you need to get those valuable plants through another summer drought. The great thing about rain barrels is that they do not fall under any state or local watering restrictions, and the water they capture is free!

To take the challenge, all you have to do is complete a checklist of water saving practices that you can easily do around your home or landscape and pledge to save at least 40 gallons per day. Complete the pledge card and return to our office to be entered instantly into a contest to win a FREE rain barrel! The pledge card can be printed from our website at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee under the upcoming local programs section. Click on the link that says "Take the 40 Gallon Challenge!" This program was made possible through grant funding from the Georgia Water Wise Council.

Also, while you are at our website, you can find out more about upcoming gardening seminars in Cherokee County. One seminar that might interest you on May 17 is "Harvesting Rainwater and Building Rain Barrels." Also, after this seminar, you will have the option of building your own rain barrel for the minimal cost of materials! This is one of our many 2008 Gardening with the Masters Seminars this year that will focus on water conservation in the landscape. You can call our office to sign up or go online for more information. Be sure to sign up early for this and other upcoming educational seminars!

For more information on water saving tips and current outdoor watering restrictions, you can go to www.conservewatergeorgia.net or www.georgiadrought.org.

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