

ARE YOU READY?

How to prepare for a drought

Did you know that you can be in a drought and not even know it? They happen so slowly over time that you may not notice their impact right away. However, they are as dangerous as other disasters.



What is drought?

A drought is a period of unusually dry conditions marked by high temperatures and low levels of rain. When rainfall is less than normal for weeks, months or years, droughts can damage crops, strain water supplies, start wildfires and cause heat-related illnesses. Some places are at higher risk for drought than others, especially dry regions in the western United States.

How can you prepare for a drought?

Preparing for drought means saving water. When temperatures rise and there is little rainfall, people tend to use water much faster than it can be replaced. Each person uses about 80-100 gallons of water per day, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Water is essential for life — that's why it is important to save this resource so that everyone can have it.

Water conservation techniques

During a drought, you should always observe state and local water-use restrictions. For example, officials may recommend watering lawns and washing cars only on certain days of the week.

You can reuse the water that would typically go down your sink or shower drain. Place a bucket in your shower or sink to collect water, and then use it to water your indoor plants or garden. You can also capture water while waiting for it to get hot or cold.



In the bathroom, you can take shorter showers and replace your showerhead with an ultra-low-flow version. Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth, washing your face or shaving. Repair any dripping faucets or leaky toilets. A leaky faucet that drips at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons per year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Invest in energy-efficient home appliances that use less water and will end up saving you money in the long-run. Install home appliances such as dual-flush toilets, low-flow taps, front-loading washing machines and water-efficient dishwashers. Once installed, you should only use dishwashers and washing machines when they are full.

There are also several ways to conserve water while maintaining your lawn. Install efficient outdoor watering systems, such as low-volume micro-irrigation for gardens, trees and shrubs. Micro-irrigation includes drip, micro-spray jets, micro-sprinklers or bubbler irrigation. You can also plant native grasses and shrubs that require less watering and can withstand drier conditions. In general, you shouldn't overwater your plants.



Beat the heat

Although you may be advised to use less water, make sure to keep yourself hydrated. A drought can make hot weather feel even hotter, so wear light clothing and avoid staying outdoors for long periods of time. Heat-related illnesses — such as heat stress, heat exhaustion and heat stroke — can be serious, so seek medical help if you are dizzy, dehydrated, nauseous or heavily sweating.

Be aware of the air quality, especially if you or a loved one have respiratory conditions. The dry conditions and wildfires that often occur with droughts increase the amount of dust and smoke in the air, which can harm your body's airways and make any illnesses you have even worse.

Image credits

Parched ground: Photo by Rockin' Rita, courtesy Flickr

Drought sign in front of the Sacramento Capitol: Photo by Kevin Cortopassi, courtesy Flickr

Baby drinking water: Photo by Goldcastle7, courtesy iStockphoto