

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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## Water, Water, Everywhere!

One of the unexpected positive aspects of our current drought for me has been seeing so many people invite and welcome the rain. I love watching us remember how essential water is — not only for our drinking needs, but also to support our farmers, fisherfolk, food supply, recreation, lush vistas, healthy ecosystems, and wild creatures. Water literally brings our planet to life.

In times of plenty, we can forget how precious water really is. We can forget that nearly all the world's water is too saline or inaccessible for us to drink. Or that a third of the world's people lack access to safe drinking water, and suffer greatly as a result. Or that our bodies are about 60% water and can last only a few days without it. Experiences such as the 1930s Dust Bowl can seem to be just distant history instead of warnings for us to protect our shared ecosystems.

But now we're being shaken by seeing near-empty reservoirs, farmers losing millions and trucking in water, stranded salmon with a generation at risk, emergency declarations of disaster areas, calls to cut water use, and worries about our long dry summer. Last year was our driest year since records started in the 19th century. Recent rains have helped but levels are still very low.

However, this moment also offers us a wonderful opportunity to joyfully align our lives more with water's ways, and protect it for ourselves, our ecosystems, and generations to come.

### What You Can Do

**1) Revere water as a vital cornerstone in all of our lives.** Send gratitudes to the streams, lakes, and rainfall that provide the nurturing fluid that flows from our faucets. Doing this helps us center our actions in love and appreciation, rather than denial or complaint.

**2) Respect our limited supply by reducing your water use.** For instance, you can: Turn the water off as you brush your teeth or shave; run the washing machine and dishwasher only when full; use a broom (not a hose) to clean decks and driveways; repair water leaks immediately; and cover pools and hot tubs to reduce evaporation.

Also, consider installing water-efficient showerheads, toilets, dishwashers, and washing machines. (Rebates are often available.) Plus, wash your car at a carwash, to be water-efficient and keep soap and oil out of our environment.

**3) Manage your land, garden, and farm in water-wise ways.** For instance:

- Reduce your irrigation, and consider installing a drip irrigation system.
- Plant drought-tolerant plants, and design to minimize water needs.
- Create walkways and driveways out of porous materials such as gravel, not nonporous materials such as standard asphalt. This helps rain recharge our groundwater while reducing flooding and erosion. You can also find porous asphalt, concrete, and paver options.
- Explore permaculture's wonderful methods for shaping your land to fit with nature's ways. A great place to start is *Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture*, by Toby Hemenway.

**4) Capture and share your wastewater.** We can use much of the water going down our drains to nurture our drought-impacted ecosystems and creatures while reducing our outdoor water use.

So, for example, you can put a bowl or bucket under your faucet while rinsing plates, brushing teeth, or warming up water. (Any cleaners captured need to be non-toxic and phosphate-free.) Then share your bounty with your

plants and trees (though not food plants). You can also catch water from downspouts in watertight barrels, for later use.

To learn about creating a more formal greywater system for your (non-toilet) water discards, see <http://bit.ly/1fzpw09>.

**5) Protect the limited water we have from toxics and pollutants.** For instance: avoid using toxics at your home and work; wash paintbrushes in your sink (not outside); fix leaks in your car; and dispose of toxics properly. Also buy nontoxic products, including organic food, to support the folks who avoid using toxics. For more ideas, see [www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html).

**6) Act to help reverse climate change and restore nature's cycles.** Our current increasing weather extremes are the result of insufficient action in the past. But we can act now to help steer ourselves back towards weather system stability.

For more about what you can do to create happier water tomorrows, see [www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7e.html](http://www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7e.html).

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