40 Gallon Challenge

Take the 40 Gallon Challenge and pledge to save 40 gallons of water each day for your county, your state and your country. The 40 Gallon Challenge is a call for residents and businesses to reduce their region’s water use on average by 40 gallons per person, per day. There are lots of ways to conserve water, what can you do to help?
Visit the 40 gallon challenge website and make your pledge towards water conservation today! www.40gallongchallenge.org Follow the link for Texas.

Top 3 actions pledged saving the most water:
- Reduce irrigation station runtimes by 2 minutes (saved 37,040 gallons)
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways and sidewalks (saved 25,608 gallons)
- Add mulch (2’-3’) around trees and plants (saved 24,100 gallons)

Will you take the challenge?

Produced by the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences® 2011

In order to do so, we are going to need your help. Please call our office at 817.884.1945 or fill out the form attached below and return to our office via email, fax or postal mail at:

Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Extension in the City NL
PO Box 1540, Fort Worth, TX 76101
Fax# 817.884.1941
Tarrant-TX@tamu.edu

* Email addresses will remain confidential & will not be shared with anyone outside our agency.
Control methods are classified into four broad areas: cultural, mechanical, biological, and chemical. Depending upon the target species one or a combination of these techniques can be used to manage weeds in ponds.

Cultural techniques modify the environment to make conditions less suitable for weed growth. They include drawdowns, the use of physical barriers (such as fibrous screens), pond dyes, and fertilizers.

Current biological control methods are limited to the use of triploid sterile grass carp. It is the most effective and least costly long-term management tool for weed problems in ponds. Grass carp feed primarily on submersed plant species (such as, pondweeds, naiads, and hydridla). A permitting process is required to use grass carp, and approval is through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Other biological control methods are in the works and hopefully will become approved and readily available.

Several herbicides and algaeicides are available for chemical control of properly identified target weeds and algae. However, do not select herbicides as your first choice if other more environmentally acceptable and equally effective management options can be used. Herbicide application rates for ponds and lakes are expressed in three ways: in pounds or gallons per square acre; in terms of the herbicide concentration in the water in parts per million (ppm); in pounds or gallons per acre-foot (the equivalent of 1 square acre of water 1 foot deep). You will need to have the dimensions of the pond in order to properly calculate the treatment area and to determine the amount of chemical to apply. As with all pesticides you must read and follow all label directions.

Many of us do not enjoy going to the doctor, so we go until the last possible moment, when something simple has now escalated into something more serious. Do you do this with your finances? You want to start saving money on how you are spending and you keep putting it off. Then before you know it you are trying to figure out how to manage through a financial crisis? It’s time to make a financial appointment with yourself, when you do, it will help you to: assess problems or a potential problem; evaluate progress towards your goals you wrote; help identify action steps and even provide motivation to change.

Time to do some reviewing, some are very basic and then there are some detailed financial areas to check on, each one just as important.

1. Are you still happy with your bank/credit union? Are you making use of the accounts offered? Did you sign up the correct overdraft protection? Are you utilizing and inquiring about discounts? (students, seniors, young children) Make sure that you are still happy with your choice. Make sure that you pay attention to all information that your bank/credit union sends you concerning account plans and changes.

2. Have you reviewed your spending plan? Are you tracking your income and expenditures and making sure to stay within your own personal limits? Sometimes it takes a while to bounce back after the ‘season’, however, with smart steps to get back on track it shouldn’t take long. Have you looked at the ‘regular’ expenses such as property taxes or car insurance to make sure you have stayed on target? Review and revise as needed (non-crisis mode) to be prepared for financial change. Have you looked at your spending plan as Income = Fixed expenses + Flexible expenses + 1/12th of occasional expenses + Savings. 3. Have money for emergencies? You will hear several recommended amounts, however, begin with 3 – 6 months, work up to 9 – 12 months of living expenses. Ultimately, any savings is better than no savings.

4. Have you written financial goals and provided yourself a schedule to reach your goals? That is a good thing! You could be saving to pay $5,000 – $10,000 for a new car and making that plan for five years. Set a specific deadline date and put figures down that you would like to work towards. Calculate benchmark progress indicators and make sure that you are still on track every year. Guess what? It is ok to be off a little, you might just need to adjust your deadline by a month or two.

5. Know your marginal tax bracket. Know what you need to make sure that you are at least breaking even on your taxes. If you are paying the IRS every year, then what do you need to do to make those changes? Are you making sure that you are counting all allowable deductions? Double check yourself, visit the IRS.gov website to review a plan. Make certain that you are using a reputable tax preparer service such as a certified public account or a free site at the library or a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) location. Call 211 for information on free tax preparation. CPA’s are not allowed to do advertise to file taxes, a little research on your part can go along way (save you money too.)

Stay tuned for more test questions... Solving financial issues takes time, consider the future information provided as follow up appointments. As you review your financial order, you might find other items that need to be checked up on.

Upcoming workshops:

Welcome to Retirement ~ Tuesday, March, 20, 2012 at 6:15 – 8:30 at Texas AgriLife Extension office Tarrant County Plaza. Register by Monday, March 13 $15.00

Caring for Family Members and Their Money ~ Wednesday’s April 11, 18, 25, and May 2 $45.00 at the Extension office Tar- rant County Plaza. Registration must be received by Thursday, April 5.
We've all heard about the need for conserving water. While the worse drought in Texas history is showing signs of lessening in intensity, parts of North Texas are classified by the U.S. Drought Monitor as abnormally dry with approximately 70% of the state in an extreme or exceptional drought. These conditions have prompted local municipalities to invoke rate hikes and restrictions affecting you and your family. To reduce water consumption in the kitchen alone, here are some tips to help you get started...

• Retrofit a wasteful kitchen faucet by installing an aerator with flow restrictions.
• Repair a leaky faucet by replacing washers. When a faucet drips at the rate of one drop per second, you can expect to waste 2,700 gallons of water per year.
• Insulate water pipes to get hot water faster and avoid wasting water while it heats up.
• Consider installing an instant water heater on your kitchen sink so you don't have to let the water run while it heats up.
• Limit use of a garbage disposal. Save scraps and run the disposal once to conserve water. Use the disposal even less by using food waste to start a compost pile.
• Store drinking water in the refrigerator rather than letting the tap run every time you want a cool glass of water.
• Turn off water completely when washing hands for the recommended 20-seconds.
• To heat water for beverages use a tea kettle to lose less water through evaporation; likewise, when cooking, cover pots with tight-fitting lids to cut down on evaporation and nutrient loss.
• Choose the proper-size pot or pan for cooking -- oversized utensils use more cooking water.
• Plan one-dish meals in which vegetables are cooked or baked without adding water.
• Use a pan of water when peeling & cleaning veggies/fruits rather than letting the sink tap run.
• Prepare vegetables in a small amount of water which saves both water and nutrients.
• Cook in the microwave oven or pressure cooker to save water, energy and time.
• Time foods that need to boil or simmer to avoid losing too much water through evaporation.
• When cooking with water (to boil eggs or pasta) don’t pour water down the drain after food has cooked. Let it cool and use for watering plants.
• Save leftover vegetable juices for soups, cooking raw or frozen veggies, stews and making gravy. Refrigerate and use juices within a day or two.
• Using syrups and juices from canned goods saves water and makes foods taste better. Use leftover fruit juices for drinking and making gelatin salads.
• Cut down on the number of utensils used in food preparation, and on the plates and glassware used with meals to save on dishwashing used to clean them.
• Serve water with meals only if people drink it.
• Wait until your dishwasher is full before running a full cycle and properly set the water-level for the size of load you are using.
• Scrape rather than rinsing dishes that go into the dishwasher for immediate washing.
• When washing dishes by hand, fill one sink or pan with soapy water for washing and a second sink/pot of hot water to rinse rather than rinsing under a running faucet.

With the start of the New Year, it has never been a more perfect time to get started on a healthier you. Of course, common resolutions are to lose X number of pounds, to work out X number of times a week, and to eat X number of fruits and vegetables. While these are great resolutions and goals to work towards, they are often abandoned shortly after. If you are one of those who have already thrown your resolutions out the window, try this one: enjoy your food, but eat less. Sounds simple, right? It is!

It just so happens that “Enjoy your food, but eat less” is the chosen USDA’s MyPlate key message from January to April. Think of it as a New Year resolution for all of America. We excel in enjoying our food but now it is time to focus on eating less of it. That doesn’t require any measurements, driving to the gym, or even changing our diet. All you need to do is eat less and you will reap the health benefits. Before you know it, you may be motivated to readopt your original resolutions.

To start, first determine your personal daily calorie limit. Visit http://www.choosemyplate.org. Using the new Super Tracker tool, you can track your food intake and your physical activity. Throughout the day, keep your calorie limit in mind when deciding what to eat and drink. Does it fit into your daily food plan? If not, opt for something healthier or have a glass of water to drink instead. Do you need that extra cookie that’s an additional 200 calories? Probably not. In addition to watching the number of calories we consume, we need to make sure that we are getting all of our necessary nutrients. To do this, we need to eat the recommended amount from each food group daily. It’s a give and take relationship in which we must find a balance. Taking in just an additional 100 calories each day can result in a gradual weight gain over time. Remember, you can enjoy your food, just eat less of it.

My top five foods to eat less of:
• Restaurant Foods
• Coffee (choose water or milk instead)
• Processed foods
• Sodium
• Ice cream (choose low-fat frozen yogurt topped with fruit)

My top five foods to enjoy more of:
• Breakfast
• Colorful vegetables (especially in my packed lunches)
• Water
• Fish (twice a week)
• Whole-grains

Reference: American Water & Energy Savers and Extension Service - USDA Program Aid Number 1102
As we all are aware 2011 was a terrible drought time for most of us here in North Texas and everyone certainly suffered including our soil! After attending several meetings on water and the weather, it doesn’t look like 2012 is predicted to be any change in the continued drought.

The Forestry departments throughout Texas are predicting the loss of millions of trees including up to 20-25% of the tree canopy right here in Ft. Worth. I would guess the majority of us all lost plant materials and sod in our own yards as well. Looking around the metro there were a few yards and businesses that were still lush and beautiful and it wasn’t because they overwatered. These landscapes have one thing in common and that’s well prepared organic soils.

So you ask what can I do to help offset the consequences of last year’s drought and get ready for the possible drought this year? One possibility obviously is plant a whole lot of new plants? Another possibility would be to water more? The best possibility would be to amend the soil, pick well adapted plants for our area, mulch well and water only as needed and very efficiently!

This last year with the extreme drought and high temperatures the soil was baked and the majority of the living organisms in the soil were killed. We need to amend the soil and add compost back to the soil to bring it back to life and then protect it with some good quality mulch to hold the effects of the heat and drought to a minimum. I read once on a poster something that stuck in my mind all these years. ‘The soil is the engine of the garden and should be treated as a resource’.

The beneficial soil life can then perform its job only if we do our part in following six important rules when growing new or existing plants.

Rules to Grow By:

1. Use the best adapted plant varieties for each and every environment.
2. Plant in the preferred season. Trees in late fall, roses in early spring.
3. Balance the mineral content of the soil, perhaps through the use of a soil sample sent to A&M’s soil lab?
4. Build and maintain the soil organic content – humus. You can never get too much composted material back into the soil!
5. Do nothing to harm the beneficial soil life.
6. Consider troublesome insects and most diseases as symptoms of one of the above rules having been violated!

Of the above rules, the fourth rule is the most important. It is the law of recycle and return. When best practiced, it supports the other five rules and makes them less important.

So in the words of a famous Horticulturalist that I have long admired: Compost once and Mulch Forever!

Enjoy your yard; keep the soil alive and let Mother Nature take care of the plants. Instead of raking all of those leaves up and bagging them and sending them to the landfill, compost them and put it right back into your yard!

2011 was unusually hot and dry in Texas. The National Weather Service recently ranked it as the state’s driest year on record and put it at #2 on the hot list. That’s not good news to anyone whoever goes outdoors, but it was an especially challenging year for our landscapes. Because landscapes need water to survive but are often viewed as less than necessary when time comes to allocate scarce water resources, and because our own Texas State Climatologist and professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M University, Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon has declared that drought conditions are likely in Texas for another five years or so, people who care about the preservation of our green infrastructure should be concerned.

It is true that landscape irrigation does account for up to 65% of residential water consumption, and that landscape irrigation drives the peak water use. It is not necessarily true that landscape irrigation “wastes” water. Plants in our environment provide a variety of environmental, economic, social and aesthetic benefits and keeping them alive in a hot, dry summer is a reasonable use of a limited resource.

Water conservation is the simplest, least expensive way to insure that we have enough water for the next few likely dry years. Simple measure like not irrigating during the hottest, windiest parts of the day, as mandated by our year round permanent restriction on landscape sprinkler irrigation between 10 am and 6 pm, and can do conserve water. That simple rule reduced water usage by 15% when enacted.

Now is the time to make every effort to conserve water by improving the efficiency of irrigation systems, managing irrigation scheduling carefully and following the rules.

How dry are we now?

Even though rainfall as measured at DFW International Airport was 10.26 inches below average for 2011, we did end the year on a wet note. Rainfall for December was 1.86 inches above normal. The US Drought Monitor [http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu] now puts Tarrant County in its abnormally dry category, the least severe of the drought intensity stages.

Water restrictions in most of Tarrant County are triggered by the water levels in the five lakes that the Tarrant Regional Water District can tap to provide our drinking water. As of January 12, 2012, these lakes were at 72% of capacity. At their lowest level last October, they sunk to 68%. The trigger for Stage 1 Water Warning restrictions is 75%, which was reached last summer. Among other measures, outdoor irrigation is restricted to two days per week. Because lake levels would have to reach 85% to move us out of Stage 1, it is likely that we will remain there this summer. The trigger for Stage 2 Water Warning restrictions is 60%. Stage 2 would limit landscape watering to one day per week.

Once per week watering, while not always easy and convenient, does provide an opportunity to keep our landscapes alive. A Stage 3 Water Emergency, triggered at lake levels of 45%, would eliminate outdoor irrigation. Unfortunately, our neighbours to the east who are served by the North Texas Municipal Water District are close to reaching that level of restrictions, their Stage 4. Their primary reservoir, Lavon Lake, is at 52% of its capacity. There are a total of 41 cities that are served by the NTMWD including most of the fast growing suburbs north and east of Dallas: McKinney, Frisco, Allen, Plano, Mesquite, Rowlett, and so on. The reasons that they are in such dire straits go beyond the weather and rapid population growth to include invasive species (zebra mussels) and possibly lack of adequate planning.

Fortunately, we Tarrant County residents have the opportunity to avoid that situation and keep the plants that keep us cool, clean up our air, add value to our homes, strengthen our community, and make everything look so much better.
As one of the six pillars of character, caring emphasizes the need to be kind to others with your words and actions, to be helpful, to be thankful and to practice empathy. It is often equated simply with love. While caring is a component of love, it is important to note its broader significance. One can care for someone but not necessarily love them and yet the mere act of caring can have a great impact. Leo F Buscaglia who was often referred to as “Dr. Love” stated, “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” Mr. Buscaglia’s words summarize the journey of a youth development professional and the mission to matter in the life of a child.

Share the following activity with a child you care about. It can be adapted for anyone or any occasion. It would be an ideal “Just Because” gesture for someone you care about, a small act that may “turn a life around” J. This activity was taken from Family Fun: http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/homemade-cards-gifts/homemade-cards/mothers-day-cards/a-spot-of-tea-card-1007634/

**A Spot of Tea**

**Total Time Needed:**
1 Hour

With its soothing, tucked-in treat, this greeting is brimming with thoughtfulness.

**Materials:**
- 8½- by 11-inch sheet of card stock
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Tape
- String
- Stapler
- Glue
- Tea bag

**Printable template**

**Instructions:**
1. Fold an 8½- by 11-inch sheet of card stock in half widthwise. Draw a teacup along the bottom (download our template) with the handle touching the fold (right). Cut out the cup, leaving the fold at the handle uncut.
2. Open the cup. Add a tag by taping a 2-inch piece of string to the left half of the card. Write a message on a small piece of card stock, then staple it to the other end of the string.
3. To form a pocket for the tea bag, trace the cup on the remaining card stock and cut out the shape. Glue the bottom and sides of this cup to the inside of the card (right). Add your message.
4. When the glue is dry, tuck a tea bag in the pocket.

**Variations:**

**More greetings:**
- Hope you have a tea-riffic Mother’s Day.
- Tea is for teacher.
- You’re my cup of tea.

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In our final article of this series I am going to conclude the trifecta with the question “What is the Trinity Watershed and what does it have to do with me and why should I care?”

**Definition**

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a watershed is the area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place.

I think that John Wesley Powell’s definition explains things clearly “a watershed is that area of land […] within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of a community” (http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/whatis.cfm).

**Okay, So What?**

According to the Trinity River Authority (http://www.trinityra.org/downloads/Final%20202010%20TRA%20BSR.pdf) “The Trinity River supports the water needs of two major population centers; the DFW Metroplex in the upper reaches and the City of Houston in the south.”

All rain that falls in Fort Worth and Tarrant County drains into a water body (stream, creek, pond, tank, river or lake) that ultimately drains into the Trinity River and eventually into Trinity Bay then into Galveston Bay and finally the Gulf of Mexico. What happens on one end may have an effect directly or indirectly on the other end or anywhere in between. For example if a section of a stream becomes so full of sediment that flow can be stopped this may cause a change in the type of plants that grow in that area thus affecting the animals that feed upon those plants (http://animalrangeextension.montana.edu/riparianmgmt/strm-wtrshds/pg2-import.htm).

So whenever changes occur in a watershed the results that follow may or may not be expected or anticipated. It is important to always try and consider that thought whenever you make changes to your property. Those changes could adversely affect someone else’s property further down the watershed. Make sure to read carefully the instructions for using herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers. Always dispose of hazardous materials properly. Improper use and disposal of these items can have an adverse effect on water quality across the state of Texas.
The 4-H program provides unique opportunities for youth to develop skills in leadership, citizenship, and service. While many of these opportunities are available at the local level, some youth seek opportunities to learn and serve at state and national levels.

For teens who are interested in gaining real-life experience in the legislative process, the Texas 4-H Congress convenes in July, 2012 at the state capitol in Austin. In preparation for the event, a 4-H member identifies an issue which affects the citizens of Texas. Following research of the issue, the teen determines the best solution to address the issue, the anticipated costs, and the responsible department. Utilizing the information, the 4-H member writes a bill for proposed legislation.

Further exploration of the process is incurred while serving in a specific position during Congress.

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OR SENATE**

Members of the Senate or House of Representatives are comprised of members who are new to the 4-H Congress experience. These members will prepare to speak effectively about issues affecting Texas youth. Additionally, House and Senate members participate in committee meetings, chamber sessions, interview with the Press Corp, and may be lobbied on different issues.

**LOBBYIST**

Members of the Lobbyist group identify specific bills and then lobby members of the House and Senate to either pass or defeat the bill. Lobbyists possess the ability to persuasively influence other members regarding legislative issues.

It is important that Lobbyists understand the Congress process and schedule. Therefore, the role is reserved for members who have previously participated in Texas 4-H Congress.

**PRESS CORPS**

Members of the Press Corp are responsible for disseminating information and maintaining strong communication. They publish a daily newspaper and facilitate electronic communication through a web page.

They possess strong communication skills in writing, interviewing, and photography as well as the dedication to meet the “press deadlines”.

These positions may be filled by 4-H teens who are first-time or returning 4-H Congress participants.

Applications for Congress are due soon. If you are interested in participating, please contact Cindy Bryant CPBryant@ag.tamu.edu 817-884-1291