

As we begin to gear up for the holiday season, we look forward to our family coming for a visit and begin to plan on cooking for the masses. This year holiday merriment will not be the only thing on our minds; water conservation and restrictions will be as well.

Reservoirs are on the rise, and restrictions may soon be lifted, but groundwater supplies are still dangerously low and water rates are stiff, causing both well and municipal water users to be concerned.

This holiday season, as each of the visiting relatives hops in for his morning shower, and as each dish and glass is set, well-users will be worrying about wells running dry, while urban water users dread the coming water bill. There are things we can all do to ease some of these water woes and enjoy the holidays.

Thanksgiving dinner preparation and cleanup require a great deal of water. We often use as many dishes for this one meal as we normally would use over a week's time.

Be sure to stay safe while preparing dinner. Good sanitary practices are essential. It is important when working with poultry, that you wash your hands with soap and hot water. To reduce water used for hand washing, place a waterless hand sanitizer next to the sink. This can be used for washing hands between other tasks, not requiring use of soap and water. Purchase waterless, antibacterial cleaning wipes to wipe down counters and other surfaces, to reduce the need to launder washrags and dish towels.

Use two cutting boards, one for vegetables and one for meats. You can reuse the vegetable board between different veggies without having to rewash as frequently as you need to wash the meat board. Another option is to use the new, disposable cutting boards.

Defrost the turkey in the refrigerator this year. To avoid a frozen turkey Thanksgiving Day, be sure to start a day or two ahead of time for an 8-12 pound bird and as many as four to five days ahead for 20-24 lbs. This defrosting method is actually safer than defrosting the turkey in a bowl of water, and helps conserve by eliminating the changing of water every thirty minutes.

In cooking the bird, try one of the handy, disposable pans available at the grocery store. This will eliminate the need for hand-washing the pan after the meal. Another option is to use oven bags. These will greatly reduce the amount of scrubbing required.

Instead of pulling out the good china and silver, use your dishwasher-safe everyday-ware; this will save you all the water and time associated with hand washing. A dishwasher uses an average of 7.0 to 12.0 gallons with every load, so make the most of it and pack the dishwasher full before you run it.

Reuse glassware. Mark each family member's glass and mug so it is distinguishable from the next. This will cut down on the number of glasses having to be washed.

To implement long-term water-conservation measures that will save water even after the holidays, consider updating your plumbing fixtures. For years, water-conserving plumbing fixtures were regarded as ineffective, with meager flows that just did not do the job. This reputation is no longer justified. Technology has improved, and now showerheads and faucets mix air with water to create a wet effect over a greater surface area. Low-flow toilets have been improved as well, now working reliably with just one flush. Not only do these devices work better than ever, they are inexpensive as well.

Low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators will result in permanent, long-term water savings at a minimal cost. A conventional showerhead uses 8.0 gallons per minute (gpm) while low-flow showerheads use at most 2.5 gpm. Low-flow showerheads can be purchased from a home improvement store for as little as \$4.00 each and up to \$30.00. Based on the average shower length, municipal water users would recoup the cost of a showerhead in as soon as 13 showers.

Faucet aerators offer additional savings. The average aerator costs between \$1.00-4.00 and reduces water flows from as high as 7.0 gpm to as low as 1.5 gpm in bathrooms and 2.5 gpm in kitchens. For municipal water users, aerators pay for themselves in as few as nine days.

Low-flow toilets use only 1.6 gallons per flush (gpf), while toilets installed prior to 1994 used a minimum of 3.5 gpf. A low-flow toilet can be purchased for around \$150.00. This means that a single user's water savings would pay for his toilet in about four months. In the meantime, a water displacement device can be placed in the tanks of older toilets to reduce the amount of water used with each flush. Try using a soda bottle filled with sand or a rock. Avoid using bricks, as they can harm your system as they degrade.

With a little creativity, everyone will be able to safely conserve water this holiday season, and may even find ways to implement changes that will result in permanent water savings.

Water Conservation Kits, including aerators, water displacement devices and showerheads are available to some municipal water customers and Albemarle County well users. If you are a city water customer, stop by the Utility Billing Office in City Hall to find out more. Albemarle County well users can contact the Albemarle County Department of Engineering and Public Works at 434.296.5861. Albemarle County Service Authority customers can call 434.977.4511, or send in the form found in the Lifestyles section of today's paper.