

'The time it never rained'

Easy steps to save our precious water

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Living Green



I inherited a healthy appetite for Western novels from my dad. One of my favorite Western authors is Elmer Kelton.

Kelton told us a tale of an epic seven-year drought in 1950s west Texas in the book titled "The Time it Never Rained." The story's ironic climax occurs when the ranch's livestock herd is reduced to a few hundred head of angora goats that then perish in a tragic fiery and freezing but life-giving rainstorm. Fortunately, our current drought situation is less dramatic, but with no appreciable precipitation in the Mesilla Valley since last summer, we can get a sense of what it is like to endure several seasons with only wind and temperature change in our forecast.

Southern New Mexico farmers and ranchers bear the biggest burden when water supplied by the river and the sky decline in our Chihuahuan desert area.

As homeowners, we can do a lot to lighten the pumping load on area aquifers.

Start with a quick check at your water service meter. Make sure the family has all of the water turned off in the home and the irrigation control system is off. Open your water meter service box and look at the meter dial flow indicator. There is typically a small dial on the face of the meter that turns while water flows to your property.

If you see movement of the flow dial in one direction while the plumbing systems are turned off, there are leaks on your property. If you can't find the culprit, give your plumber a call. Undetected water leaks like these waste

hundreds of thousands of gallons in the city and county.

Since this is the desert, most of our home landscaping is water thrifty. As we start the summer season, we should take a good look at our irrigation practices and systems to ensure everything is working as designed.

Flow restrictors often become loose on drip systems. Unseen tubing and connection leaks spring up after freezing winter conditions. Sprinklers and sprays get damaged with yard maintenance and all should be serviced to keep water going only where needed. Standing water in the street, in control boxes or gravel-mulched areas should be eliminated through repairs. Double check irrigation system controls, make sure to apply just the amount of water required to keep plants healthy.

When replacing plants "Darwinized"

this winter, be sure to select regionally appropriate varieties with lower water requirements than the predeceased.

Water that can soak naturally into home landscapes and ponding areas recharge underground supplies more quickly and will not carry silt loads and contami-

nants to storm drains and arroyos. Consider limiting paved walkways and driveways around the home. Permeable hardscapes add visual interest to your patio and yard areas and allow precipitation that does fall to percolate to the aquifer. Catch roof runoff (when it finally happens!) in rain barrels to water your material and wash your hair.

Keep pools and hot tubs covered when not in use. Evaporation rates at 10 percent relative humidity are outrageous. We have one lazy dog and he is not particularly thirsty. His one gallon porch water bowl is empty by the end of each of our recent dry, windy days.

Sturdy pool covers, properly utilized, reduce

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This Kohler Dual flush toilet is helping Team Builders Construction achieve Build Green New Mexico silver certification in its Spring Showcase of Homes entry.

the need for make-up water, stabilize water temperatures and add an increased measure of safety. Children die of drowning in Las Cruces area pools and hot tubs every year. Take time to childproof home pool and spa areas and always have adults in the pool with children when they are swimming or playing.

Consider a graywater system in your new or existing home. Lightly used shower, bath and vanity water can be reused to flush toilets or green up your turf. Local plumbing contractors offer turnkey graywater solutions at reasonable rates.

Support your local car wash. Washing your car with a hose at home tends to use more water than the more convenient commercial drive-thrus.

Inside the home you can install better efficiency or dual flush toilets (they really work now). Leaky flappers, floats or other simple toilet parts on your existing toilets can waste



Freestanding graywater-reclamation systems such as this Brac unit reuse most of your homes water from sinks, baths and showers.

thousands of gallons of water if not serviced – if you hear or see a leak, get it fixed right away.

I am not a low flow shower fan but the new fixtures available do a good job while limiting flow. Occupant activities and practices have a big impact on inside water use. Teach the kiddos to shower with a timer (or time it yourself and shut off the hot water) and to brush teeth without the faucet running. Use dish and clothes washers only when the loads are full.

Our local water gurus tell us that our underground water supplies do a remarkable job of restoring themselves over time. I don't think it can hurt for us to offer a little help – especially if it doesn't fry or freeze our goats...

Miles Dyson is the owner of Inspection Connection LC - Professional Home Energy Rating and Home Inspection Services in Mesilla Park and can be reached at 202-2457. Dyson is a RESNET certified Home Energy Rater and ASHI certified Home Inspector.



A quick check at your meter dial will let you know if you have unseen leaks on your property.