



# 40 Gallon Challenge

## issues a call to reduce residential water use

The 40 Gallon Challenge, a nationwide residential water-conservation program, is helping Texans save water in ways new to them. The continuing drought, coupled with increasing water demands due to population growth, has elevated the importance of such conservation programs.

The program challenges participants to save 40 gallons of water a day by implementing water-conserving practices, said Dr. Diane Boellstorff, Texas' representative for the program and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service water resources specialist.

"These are simple, inexpensive behavioral changes that people can adopt, and it's amazing how much water can actually be conserved," she said.

Participants take either an online or hard-copy pledge. The pledge sheet is divided into indoor and outdoor categories and allows participants to check-off new practices or actions they will do to save water.

The indoor category includes practices such as running the dishwasher only when full, shortening showers by two minutes and installing aerators with flow restrictors on faucets. The outdoor category suggests using a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways and sidewalks, reducing irrigation station runtimes by two minutes and adding mulch around trees and plants.

The pledge lists the amount of water in gallons that each practice can save.

### Taking the challenge

Those who want to take the challenge can visit [40gallonchallenge.org](http://40gallonchallenge.org). Mousing over a state and selecting a county will reveal an ever-changing count of pledges signed and gallons saved, Boellstorff said. Once participants choose their state and county, they can fill out a pledge sheet.

Texas had 2,799 pledges as of September 2013, adding up to a potential savings of 516,308 gallons per day or more than 187 million gallons per year. Texas currently leads all other states in the number of pledges and gallons saved from the challenge.

Because the program is easy to administer and share, it is a great tool for AgriLife Extension agents, Boellstorff said. When Extension agents give a presentation on the 40 Gallon Challenge or another conservation topic, they give out pledge sheets to be filled out and later entered into the challenge's database.

"If you give people the pledge sheet, the learning occurs and the behavior change follows," she said.

### Reducing water use

Boellstorff said the amount of water that participants pledge to save through the challenge amounts to about 62 percent of what they would have been projected to use annually. The result is that the water they would have used continues to be available for other purposes. She said a family of four uses about one-third of an acre-foot of water a year.

If everyone made a pledge and maintained it, big communities could easily avoid early-level drought restrictions, Boellstorff said.

Some participants are already good water savers and the pledge sheet may only offer them one or two new conservation techniques, Boellstorff said. Sometimes the challenge for water-conscious people is finding a 5-gallon challenge or other water-conserving practices they haven't already implemented, she said.

### A look behind the challenge

The 40 Gallon Challenge National Project Director Ellen Bauske, of the University of Georgia, started the challenge through the Southern

Regional Water Program (SRWP). Supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture, SRWP encompasses research, extension and education water quality programs through land grant university systems in 13 Southern states. Participating states' water quality coordinators set aside funds for special projects. The 40 Gallon Challenge was one of the special projects they chose.

Boellstorff said Bauske invited other states' extension staff to join this initiative and encouraged them to promote the challenge in their states.


### What's in store?

Boellstorff said the program has expanded in Texas because of the continuing drought since 2011. AgriLife Extension Regional Program Directors Susan Ballabina, Ron Woolley and Monty Dozier have made great efforts to promote the program, especially to county Extension agents delivering water educational programs to the public.

Boellstorff said with the drought's continued persistence, she foresees the program continuing, especially because of declining water supplies and growing populations.

The program also has room to grow. For example, people with private water wells are eager to participate to save their own water, reduce their energy bills and reduce the wear-and-tear on their pump, Boellstorff said.

"We need as many of the water conservation education programs as we can get," she said. "As they are each being developed, something new might be tried and discovered to be effective."

"So much water can be conserved through these voluntary programs that it's almost like finding new water without actually having any new water being produced, distributed or treated, just through water conservation," Boellstorff said. 

For more information about the 40 Gallon Challenge or to make a pledge, visit [4ogallonchallenge.org](http://4ogallonchallenge.org).

## SIMPLE THINGS WE CAN ALL DO

*Pledge sheet conservation techniques*

### INDOORS

Run the dishwasher only when full: saves **2** gallons daily

Not leave water running while rinsing dishes: saves **5** gallons daily

Fix a leaky toilet: saves **30** gallons daily

Fill bathtub half full while bathing: (per person) saves **18** gallons daily

### OUTDOORS

Reduce irrigation runtime by 2 minutes: saves **80** gallons daily

Use a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways and sidewalks: **22** gallons daily

Repair at least one pipe leak or broken sprinkler head: saves **20** gallons daily

Replace 10,000 sq. feet of high water-use landscape with a low water-use landscape: saves **40** gallons daily

