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It's Just That Simple: What can we do to conserve water?

California's drought is on everybody's mind. But is anyone really doing anything much on a personal level to save water?

The only thing I hear about is "the water police" warning people to sprinkle their lawns on their designated days. But what else should we be doing to help ourselves and the farmers?

Back in 1976 and 1977 there was a terrible drought in California. In the summer of 1976, I was waitressing on Catalina Island during college.

The drought hurt the island even more than other parts of the state, because it had limited sources of water. So we had to ask customers if they wanted a glass of water, rather than automatically giving it to them, only to have it thrown away because they ordered iced tea and didn't drink it. We explained there was a drought on and the town of Avalon was severely affected. Most people said they would go without or said they wanted it and drank it. A few demanded it, then let it go to waste, sadly.

Back at college that fall, I lived in a student co-op at UC Berkeley.
And believe me, we knew there was a drought on and we did something about it! We were told we needed to turn off the water while we were soaping up in the shower AND to take buckets in with us. The buckets would be used to flush the toilets or to water plants.

I was a budding journalism student then, and I did a story talking to the co-ops and other student groups about the importance of saving water and what they were doing about it. I recall someone I talked to saying the saddest loss of water was the dripping faucet.

Later as a reporter in Southern California in the 1990s, I recall writing about water conservation when there were more drought years. Of course I was working in "green" Santa Monica, but at that time the xeriscape front lawn, with native plants and cacti, was becoming a hot trend. They had a city employee whose job it was to design a public information campaign to increase water-conservation awareness and go out to homes and distribute low-flow showerheads and other devices.

Fast forward to today. We went to dinner at a popular Mexican restaurant the other night. We ordered iced tea. They also brought us water with lemon without asking if we wanted it. I noticed bus boys clearing patrons' tables, taking full or almost-full glasses of water to the kitchen to be dumped.

I wonder where the public awareness campaigns are now in the Valley? We need to conserve every drop!

What am I doing to conserve water? Well, I don't let the water run when I'm brushing my teeth. I frequently close the faucet when I'm washing dishes. I've started turning off the water in the shower while shampooing. Maybe next I'll bring in a bucket!

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