



A Painted Bunting splashes in the clear water of a South Texas lake. This award-winning photo was taken by 16-year-old Zachary Webster.

# Caretaking Our World's Water

**Ahhhh...** There's nothing like a cool drink of water when you're thirsty. People, birds, other animals, and plants all need water to live. Your own body is about two-thirds water. A 75-pound child is made up of enough water to fill about eleven large soda bottles!

Still thirsty? Go ahead, take another drink. The water you're drinking started

out as rain, snow, or another form of precipitation. As it fell from the clouds, it filled a nearby river or lake, or it drained into underground pools called aquifers. In most places, water for homes comes from the local public water supply. That's a system that pumps the water out of a river, lake, or aquifer, cleans it, and then pipes it to your home.





Common Loon

# Wise, Not Wasteful

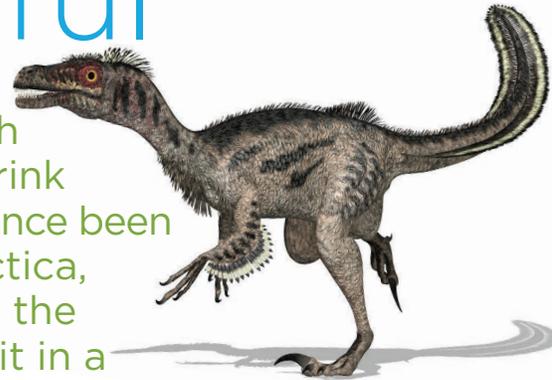
Without water, life on Earth would be impossible.

There would be no people, no animals of any kind, no plants. Water is not just for drinking. Lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water are also habitat for wildlife. How can we make sure there's enough to go around for people *and* nature? Using water wisely, not wastefully, can help conserve it. This is especially important as climate change increases the possibility of drought. Simply turning off the tap while brushing your teeth saves almost two gallons of water. Do the math for your family! Can you think of other ways you and your family can save water?

When water goes down the drain, where does it go?

As you take a shower, think about what happens to the soapy water as it slips down the drain. It likely goes to a water treatment plant where it's treated, cleaned, and released into a local river or lake. In this way water is constantly recycled.

Believe it or not, the fresh water you drink might have once been ice in Antarctica, a cloud over the ocean, or spit in a dinosaur's mouth.



We use ancient water to meet our modern needs. Earth's water is never really used up. Still, with more people using more water every day, some places struggle to provide clean, drinkable water for everyone. And when cities and towns are running low, clean water for wildlife, wetlands, and other habitats becomes even scarcer. Water is a very important natural resource.

## What's a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land where all the rain, groundwater, and melting snow, pulled by gravity, eventually flows, or drains, into one place. Watersheds often follow river systems, but they come in both big and small sizes. There are more than 2,000 watersheds in the United States, and everyone lives within one of them.

What's your watershed? Use your zip code to find out at this website: [water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/](http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/)



Rivers flow into a larger body of water.

DIY!

# Feed and Water the Birds



All wildlife needs food and water. A birdbath is a great way to make sure birds get enough to drink. You can make one with a large plastic or terra cotta saucer (the kind that go under flower pots) and an old bucket or flower pot. Just set the bucket or flower pot top-down on the ground in a shady spot near some trees or bushes. (The birds need a place to sit nearby out of sight.) Place the saucer on top. Put a small rock in the middle that comes just above the water line to give small birds a place to stand. Two inches of water is a good depth.

## Thirsty Americans

Each person in the United States uses about 80-100 gallons of water a day at home. (Most of that water gets used up in the bathroom—flushing toilets and bathing.) How does that compare to others around the world? Europeans use 45-65 gallons per person every day. Africans use only 3-13 gallons. With limited freshwater resources on Earth and with some places experiencing severe drought, Americans should do more to reduce the amount of water we use.

United States

Europe

Africa



## A Water-Saving Garden

We know from experts that climate change is affecting our planet right now. One predicted result of climate change is that there will be more droughts and they will last longer. A drought is an unusually long period with less rainfall than normal. California, for example, has been experiencing a very severe drought for several years now.

Droughts put an extra strain on Earth's already limited freshwater supply. It's important to find as many ways as possible to save water so it's available for the most important uses.

One way to save water is to use native plants in our gardens, yards, and parks. Native plants are the plants that evolved over time to survive in a particular area. In areas where dry periods are common, native plants can live with less water. But no matter where you live, it's smart to have native plants. They provide food and shelter for native birds and other animals, and they don't need as much help from people to stay healthy and beautiful.



These students know that native plants are water-saving plants.

## Not Much To Drink

Fresh water we can use

Fresh water we can't use



Earth looks like a watery world from space. But most of Earth's water is salty ocean water, not drinkable fresh water. If all Earth's water fit into a gallon jug, about half a cup of it would be fresh water. And only six or so drops of it would come from rivers and lakes. The rest of the fresh water would be in ice caps, glaciers, and the atmosphere.

# Helpful or Harmful?

**C**lean lakes and rivers are important for everybody, and everybody can help keep them pollution-free. Making better choices at home can help prevent water pollution.

Did you know that any water that flows across a yard or street can end up in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes? That's because most street drains empty right into local waters.

This water, called runoff, can carry with it liquids such as oil and solids such as litter that people have spilled or dropped. We want to make sure all bodies of water are clean for people and for wildlife. That's why it's very important to keep chemicals, soap, oil, animal waste, garbage, and other pollutants from going down street drains.

**Look at these examples of some things people do that could affect the health of bodies of water. Which are helpful and which are harmful?**

**Make your choices, then write a brief explanation of why something is helpful or harmful. You can check your answers below.**



Using a rain barrel



Cleaning up litter



Composting

**1.** planting native plants that do not need a lot of water

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**2.** composting leaves

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**3.** washing a car on a driveway

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**4.** littering

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**5.** taking non-working cell phones and computers to an e-waste collection site

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**6.** collecting rainwater in a rain barrel

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**7.** cleaning up pet waste

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**8.** creating runoff from yards and streets

Helpful  Harmful **Why?**

**Finished?**

Now go back and read through the list again. Circle actions that you think you and your family can take to help prevent water pollution.

Helpful: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7; Harmful: 3, 4, 8

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