

DROUGHT

Sunshine Coast bans outdoor water use

Only commercial farms escape restrictions

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VANCOUVER SUN

B&K Garden and Landscape Supply is known for its lovely plants and Kathy Gurney isn't about to let a summer drought change that.

That's why the Gibsons business owner has decided to defy Stage 4 water restrictions imposed by the regional district beginning Thursday for most of the Sunshine Coast. All outdoor use of tap water will be banned for everyone except commercial farms, but Gurney plans to keep on watering her stock as if nothing has changed.

"We have a huge, huge reputation for having beautiful, healthy plants. I can't lose that reputation, and I'm not going to," Gurney said. "If they want my plants dead, then somebody's going to have to cut me a cheque for my inventory."

Her water bill has been steadily climbing through the hot, dry summer as she struggles to keep her plants alive, and she's had to cut back on staff. She estimates plant sales have dropped 25 per cent over the last two months.

Gurney doesn't believe the region's water supply is in any danger of running out.

"Running around, trying to fine everybody for watering their plants, it's just an easier way to pick up the tax dollar," she said.

Deluxe Landscaping in Sechelt also stands to lose significant business — and up to \$100,000 worth of plants — because of the water restrictions.

"It's extremely problematic and it's frustrating," owner Mike Anderchek said.

But he has no plans to flout the ban on outdoor watering.

The Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden is also suffering. Even though staff has reduced water

RECYCLED WATER

Gardeners plan ahead to survive the drought



Chris Allen shows off some of the vegetables from his garden.

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Amateur horticulturists on the Sunshine Coast are getting creative to keep their gardens thriving.

Chris Allen and his wife are teachers and love spending their summer break tending to the gardens that cover most of their sunny, 1,000-square-metre property in Sechelt. When June turned out to be unusually hot and dry this year, they started saving rainwater from the roof and greywater — untreated waste water — from their kitchen and bathroom.

"The problem in Sechelt, and in many places, is that all the water we use to wash the driveway, all the water we use to water our plants, it's all potable, drinkable water," Allen said. "I started thinking, all this grey water we're flushing down, we have to start recycling it."

It's taken a little extra work and a lot of planning, but so far seems to be paying off.

Allen's two daughters, aged 10 and 8, know to keep the drain plugged while they shower. Once they're done, their dad

swoops in and scoops out the soapy water left behind, then sprinkles it on the non-edible plants in the garden.

"Nothing has shown any signs of soap stress. I've actually been quite impressed with that."

For the vegetables, the family relies on rainwater. They now have more than 300 litres, thanks mostly to a lot of running back and forth with buckets during a three-hour downpour a couple of weeks ago.

"It's just amazing how much rain can be collected."

The result has been a healthy crop of basil, peppers, grapes, cabbage, zucchini and tomatoes. Leafy greens like lettuce and arugula, on the other hand, are wilting in the heat.

The exercise has been a great learning experience. They plan to re-evaluate their garden in fall and consider replacing picky plants like hydrangea bushes with more hardy native species like mountain ash.

"I'm a firm believer that the weather is changing. It's going to be here to stay: drier summers, warmer summers."

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use for years, this summer has been a challenge, manager Mary Blockberger said.

"We've all gotten to know a lot more about water than we've ever wanted to."

Until now, volunteers have focused on watering sensitive plants like the new additions to a large rhododendron garden. Once the new restrictions come into effect, they'll have to depend on stores of rainwater.

"That'll keep us going for a while," Blockberger said. "It's only 2,500 gallons, which sounds like a lot, but it doesn't really go

that far when you're dealing with hundreds of plants."

Kitchen greywater will also help, as will water drained from a pond on the Sechelt property.

The drought this year has been a learning opportunity for people who manage the garden and visiting community members, Blockberger said. She's hoping to make next year easier by drilling a well.

In the meantime, "We're all doing rain dances."

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Stage 4 water restrictions

All outdoor use of tap water is now banned. That includes:

- All residential and commercial hand-watering of trees, shrubs, flowers and vegetables.
- Any other outdoor commercial water use.
- Commercial food growers with farm status and water meters are exempt from the ban.

B&K Garden & Landscape Supply in Gibsons is keeping its plants alive by ignoring the water ban.