

Water Budgets – Frequently Asked Questions

Why does the city use water budgets?

The main purpose behind the water budget rate structure is to allow more flexibility to water users during times of mild to moderate drought. The structure also helps to encourage continuing the water conservation efforts that Boulder residents have so successfully maintained since the drought of 2002.

The water budget rate structure is more flexible because it allows the city to adjust budgets quickly in the case of unexpected water shortages. For example, if the city were to experience a moderate drought or prolonged infrastructure emergency (a significant or costly water main break), imposing watering restrictions would be the last resort. Instead, the city would first lower water budgets and allow customers to determine how to use their budgeted water.

Is this just the city's way of telling us not to water our lawns?

No, not at all. The city wants you to take care of your landscape in efficient and water-conscious ways. As long as you aren't over watering or wasting water in other ways, you should have plenty of water to maintain a healthy landscape. You can use more water than your budgeted amount; however, you will have to pay a higher price for that water.

How you choose to use your budgeted water is up to you. If you want to use more water for a flower garden, then you might consider areas of your lawn where you can cut back, perhaps by xeriscaping an area with drought-resistant vegetation. Or perhaps, you have a swimming pool, and to make up for that extra water use, you might surround it with a patio rather than grass, or you might make sure to have water-efficient appliances in your house and implement indoor water-saving practices for your household members. Water budgets are about choice. It is up to you to choose how you use your water.

What if I use more than my budgeted amount?

If you use more than your budget, you will be charged at a higher rate for the extra water you use. For example, see the chart below. If your water usage is within your water budget, you will be billed for normal water usage (Blocks 1 and 2). If you were to use more water in one month than your budgeted amount, you would be charged at a higher Block 3 rate for the extra water used (up to 150 percent of your budget). However, if you use less than 60 percent of your budget, you will be only charged the Block 1 rate, which is the lowest rate.

Why can't I take water I saved in one billing period and roll it forward to the next billing period?

This concept is called "water budget banking." The use of banking dilutes the water conservation advantages of the rate structure. For example, if a wet May-June period leads to water savings, it would not help the cause of water conservation if customers were encouraged to spend those savings later in the year through a water budget banking program.

I'm having trouble staying within my monthly budgets. What can I do?

If you feel that you're using water wisely and still aren't able to stay within your budget, you have a few options:

- You can apply for a water budget adjustment for some specific reasons. See the water budget adjustment page for the details.
- You can request a free meter read to give you an idea of where you are prior to your next bill. You are granted one free meter read every six months. Any additional reads within the same six months will be charged an extra fee to your account.
- You can look into additional water conservation options. The City of Boulder has a Water Conservation Program designed to help you with these efforts. Visit Water Conservation for conservation tips, rebate program information, to sign up for a free irrigation audit of your property, and other information.

How can I track my water usage?

Keep an eye on your monthly bill. If you need more information than that, the city offers each customer one extra, complimentary meter reading every six months. Meter technicians will read your meter and leave a door hanger with the information. If you want an additional reading within that six-month timeframe, you will be charged an extra fee for each extra reading you request.

What if I don't agree with the amount of water budgeted for me?

The city offers water budget adjustments for specific reasons. See the [Water Budget Adjustments](#) page for the details. The adjustment becomes effective the date it is received by the city and a confirmation of the approved adjustment is mailed to the customer.

When is my meter read? Can homeowners read their own meters?

Water meters are read once a month and that water-use information is conveyed to you each month on your water bill. Customers are only billed for water used, regardless of their water budget amount. Homeowners are not allowed to access their own meter, per city code. This is for your own personal safety as well as safety and maintenance concerns for the meter.

What considerations are made when calculating monthly budgets to account for gardens and maintenance of adjacent right-of-way areas?

Irrigation-only and Commercial Indoor-Outdoor accounts automatically have public right-of-way areas included in their irrigable area. Single family residences who water adjacent right-of-way areas can submit a water budget adjustment form to have that area added to their water budget.

There is no adjustment allowed for additional water for gardens. If you want to use more water for your garden, then you might consider other areas where you can cut back on water use. Water budgets are about choice. It's up to you to choose how you use your water.

Is the budgeted amount of water really enough to grow things in Boulder even in winter?

Yes, the amount allocated provides enough water for healthy landscapes but not so much that it is easily wasted. The majority of Boulder water customers currently use water quite effectively in creating and maintaining quality landscapes in this community.

Indoor budget allocations were made large enough to provide for some outdoor, hand-watering during a dry winter. You should have enough water to address winter-time needs for trees and shrubs.

Does my monthly budget allow for watering trees in the winter months? If not, can I get more water?

Monthly water budgets were designed to be generously adequate for most of the city's 30,000 water customers. Single-family residential accounts are allocated 7,000 gallons per month during the winter (December - February). The average use for single-family accounts in these winter months is less than 5,000 gallons, so the additional 2,000 gallons per month could be used for winter watering of trees and shrubs (or however the customer chooses).

For those customers interested in watering trees: They should be watered at a rate of 10-15 gallons per diameter-inch. For example, a 10-inch diameter tree needs 100-150 gallons once per month during the winter months.

Why isn't the outdoor portion of the water budget adjusted for actual rainfall?

Rainfall occurs in real time and cannot be included in a budget developed in advance. The budgets were based on historic weather patterns, including rainfall and were established to provide for the basic needs of turf. However, the new water budget rate structure does give the city flexibility in adjusting customer's water budgets based on prolonged weather patterns such as drought.

Does the City of Boulder offer rebates or other incentives for water conservation measures?

The City of Boulder does offer rebates for the installation of a variety of water-saving products. For rebate information as well as water conservation tips, visit the [Water Conservation page](#).

How is my sewer (wastewater) charge calculated with the water budget?

Wastewater charges are calculated independent of water budgets. Wastewater charges consist of a fixed service charge and a quantity charge. The service charge is based on meter size and whether you are inside or outside city limits. During the Average Winter Consumption (AWC) calculation period (December - March), quantity charges are billed using actual water use.

For the remainder of the year, charges for residential customers are based on AWC or actual water use, whichever is less. Commercial/industrial/institutional (CII) customers who use either the HMU or the AMU budget option are billed using each month's actual water use or AWC, whichever is less for all 12 months. CII customers using the Indoor/Outdoor budget option are charged for wastewater based on their actual water use.

In the multifamily residence category, where did the city get the information about the number of units and bedrooms in buildings?

The city obtained the 'number of units' information from residential billing records. Each unit was automatically assigned two bedrooms. If your account information is wrong, please contact Utility Billing at (303)-441-3260.