

Oh, Dry Up! MARIANNE PETERS

Save energy and money this summer: trade your gas or electric dryer for a clothesline. It's not revolutionary: people have relied on free solar power to dry their clothes a lot longer than they've relied on machines. This summer I'm hanging out our laundry for the first time ever. I grew up in the city, and sometimes I realize that I'm still learning how to be a country girl. A new dog learning old tricks.

I hesitated at first, wondering if the neighborhood association would cast my family into the outer darkness for pinning up our underwear in broad daylight. Actually, several homes in our subdivision have clotheslines already. We don't, but using my glider rocker, a drying rack, and two salvaged wire shelves, I've rigged up a good system.

I've learned a lot already. For instance, timing is important. On a recent trip to France, my husband and I stayed with a friend at his mother's comfortable home in the south. She is a professional woman with a good income, but she doesn't own a dryer. I noticed that she put a load of clothes in the washer before bed, hung them up to dry in the morning before work, and took them down at night. It seemed like a good routine. Washing during off hours is good for the power grid, and since I work from home, doing a load at night gives me a head start. I can usually manage two

or three loads a day if the weather's cooperating.

That's another thing—the weather. Unfortunately, Indiana is not quite as reliably glorious as the south of France. When it's going to be a hot day, I get busy and gather up my clothes for washing, but cloudy days work too—it just takes longer. Some people always do their laundry on a certain day, no matter what the weather. I do too—it's just that a “certain day” happens to occur several times a week!

My clothes feel crisper when I hang them out to dry. It helps if I give them a good shake before I hang them up. My towels are slightly scratchy, but more absorbent, especially since I don't use fabric softener on them. (Softener actually decreases a towel's ability to absorb water.) Air-drying is better for clothes—they will last longer and won't shrink. I've found that if I throw a cup of white vinegar in with the rinse cycle, they come out softer and smelling fresh.

Hanging up clothes gives me margin. My summer household is a busy place as I try to keep a writing schedule in the midst of an active family. I get frazzled trying to multitask. But when I step outside to hang up laundry, I can only do one thing since the task takes two hands. I'm away from the phone and the computer for a few blessed minutes, and I'm usually not gone long enough for the kids to

miss me. I can bask in the sun, smell the blooming privet bush, pray a little (or a lot, depending on how the day is going), and watch the butterflies patronize the coneflowers. Summertime stands still for just a moment. Then: “Hey, Mom!”

When I'm shivering through an Indiana winter, I try to use my electric dryer efficiently, always doing a full laundry load at a time and avoiding the high heat setting because it's hard on clothes. You can save energy using machine dryers as long as you use them properly. The U.S. Department of Energy's website gives some great some tips:

- Dry heavy loads separate from light ones.
- Prevent a house fire by cleaning the lint filter after every use and regularly inspecting your dryer vent for blockage.
- Use a moisture sensor if you have one so that you don't dry out your clothes.
- Use products labeled Energy-Star.

Meanwhile, I'm giving my clothes the “star treatment” by using the free heat from earth's own star, the sun. Give it a try!

Check out the Department of Energy's website for more energy-saving information at www.energy.gov/energytips.htm. ■

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