

Royal Pools by Adams Reveals Pool vs. Lawn Water Use Analysis for Snow-Drought Year

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Royal Pools by Adams has published a recalculation of the long-debated backyard pool versus lawn water question, applying the arithmetic to Bay Area conditions after California's Water Year 2026 closed on September 30 with a documented snow drought. The analysis, authored by Chief Marketing Officer Ray Langford, was released October 2, 2026.

The backdrop for the analysis is an unusual water year. Statewide rainfall in Water Year 2026 came in at roughly 97 percent of average, yet the April 1 snowpack measured just 20 percent of its historical median, the second-lowest reading since monitoring began, according to California WaterBlog at UC Davis and the National Drought Mitigation Information System. A hot, dry March, the driest on record for California's river basins, melted away more than five million acre-feet of snow storage in a single month, per the Public Policy Institute of California. As of the final U.S. Drought Monitor reading in September, about 30 percent of California sat in drought categories D1 or worse, with another 46 percent abnormally dry.

The familiar claim that pools use less water than lawns traces to drought-era studies in hotter, drier parts of the state, including a California Pool and Spa Association study citing savings of as much as 18,000 gallons a year and a Santa Margarita Water District finding of about 8,000 gallons a year. Royal Pools by Adams reran the figures for a mild Bay Area climate on a 500 square foot, 19,000 gallon pool. By its estimates, an uncovered pool loses roughly 14,000 gallons a year to evaporation, a lawn on the same footprint uses about 9,300 gallons a year, and a pool covered when not in use loses roughly 700 gallons a year, since a cover suppresses evaporation by about 95 percent according to U.S. Department of Energy guidance.

With the one-time fill spread over 20 years, the covered pool saves about 7,650 gallons a year against the lawn and pays back its fill in roughly 2.5 years, while the uncovered pool uses about 5,650 gallons a year more than the lawn. The pool and lawn figures are Royal Pools by Adams estimates built from the stated assumptions, and the earlier studies still hold in hotter regions. The conclusion is conditional: whether a pool

uses more or less water than a lawn in the Bay Area depends almost entirely on whether it is covered.

"A pool designed today should be built to lose as little water as possible, and planning the cover into the design from the start is the single decision that matters most," said Ray Langford, Marketing Director at Royal Pools by Adams. "The numbers show the cover does the heavy lifting, so builders and homeowners who treat it as an afterthought are leaving thousands of gallons on the table every year."

For scale, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission delivers about 265 million gallons a day to 2.7 million customers, so a full 19,000 gallon fill equals about six seconds of that flow, and all urban water use is about 11 percent of California's developed water in an average year, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

Readers can review the full analysis from Royal Pools by Adams at royalpools.com or by phone at (408) 371-8000. Royal Pools by Adams designs and builds custom swimming pools for homeowners in San Jose and the Bay Area.

Royal Pools by Adams is a swimming pool contractor based in San Jose, California, with more than 52 years of experience. The company specializes in residential and commercial swimming pool construction, builds Royal Pools by Adams custom pools across the Bay Area, and also provides pool resurfacing. It is a member of the California Pool & Spa Association and the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance.

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Royal Pools by Adams

Royal Pools, founded in 1969, is a Bay Area pool builder specializing in custom pools and spas. They offer energy-efficient designs, superior craftsmanship, and lifetime warranties.

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