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# Water Catchment, a Way of Caring for a Precious Resource

By **Monica Woelfel**

With the potential of a dry year on the horizon, Valley residents and government bodies alike are again considering the best ways to conserve water. And some homeowners have found low-tech, old-time ideas to help irrigate their gardens while avoiding the purchase of expensive municipal water supplies.

In fact, one source of residential irrigation water is as old as the skies — rainwater.

Rainwater harvesting involves catching run-off from a roof and filtering it into storage tanks for irrigation and other non-potable uses. Several local companies are offering supplies and expertise, and have already put a number of residential systems in place.

According to Ken Foster of Terra Nova Ecological Landscaping, these days there is increasing interest in so-called “catchment” or “rainwater harvesting” methods in Santa Cruz County.

“I call it the new urban watershed,” said Foster, of using catchment systems like the rainwater ones he installs. “We’re taking responsibility for the water on site.”

Landscape architect Bobby Markowitz of Earthcraft Landscape Design sees the benefits in terms of independence.

“Having your own rainwater catchment gives you independence. It allows you to keep your plants watered [in any conditions],” he said.

Markowitz, a UCSC alumnus and landscape professional since 1977, has designed many rainwater systems in the area.

He says that people are often not aware of the “massive amounts” of water that come off their roofs. According to him, 10 inches of rainfall on a modest 1,000-square-foot building will yield 6,000 gallons of water.

In the Scotts Valley area, where average annual rainfall is 41 inches, a 10-inch rainfall is easy to come by.

“Even if each home only saved 1,000 gallons, you’re talking about hundreds of thousands of gallons that can be saved,” Markowitz said, of the technology’s potential for county-wide conservation.

“That's how they solve the water crisis here.”

### **Rainwater Harvesting — Tanks and Filters**

Scotts Valley Sprinkler & Pipe Supply is one local business that's gearing up to supply catchment equipment.

"We're just now introducing rainwater harvesting," said store manager Brenny Lutz. "We start right at the top, from filters that would go into your gutter to keep debris out, down to a range of storage tanks."

Scotts Valley Sprinkler offers above-ground tanks with capacities from 100 gallons (or less) up to 5,000 gallons. The company doesn't do installation, but leaves that to landscape experts like Markowitz or Foster.

Markowitz will lead a number of one-day seminars on rain harvesting at the Scotts Valley store, starting Sunday, Apr. 22 at noon. There is no charge for the seminars, but because space is limited, anyone interested in participating is asked to call the store (831-438-6450) to reserve a spot.

### **Underground Tanks Possible**

A new local company, Rain Source Water (a division of Pondsaway), has come up with a way to put rainwater storage tanks underground, saving yard space and keeping them out of sight. Previously, underground storage tanks ran the risk of collapsing when empty. Rain Source's modular inserts solve this problem.

The cost of either rainwater system varies depending on the tank size and how extensive an irrigation system is.

Is a rainwater-harvesting system cost effective?

"Over time, absolutely," said Foster. He noted that water prices may continue to rise as the supply grows scarcer.

For Foster, Markowitz, and others involved with rain harvesting systems, however, the bottom line is not simply a dollar figure. They value independence and water conservation as well as keeping the water we have free of pollution. According to Foster, it's about "taking care of this precious resource of water. The last thing we want," he concluded, "is to send water into the gutter, collecting pollution all the way to the bay."

Bobby Markowitz offers more information at his Earthcraft Landscape Designs website [www.earthcraftdesign.com](http://www.earthcraftdesign.com) or by phone (831-475-9355).

Scotts Valley Sprinkler's website is [www.svsprinklerandpipe.com](http://www.svsprinklerandpipe.com) ■

