

Published March 17th, 2010

Catching the Rain

By Sophie Braccini



Gutter door Photo Andy Scheck

It is one of Deva Rajan's simple pleasures to collect rainwater from the gutters that have been cleaned by the winter showers, and to make tea with it. "What better use of the rain water can one make?" asks the Canyon resident. At the other end of the scale of rain catchment, Canyon Construction, the developer that restored the Moraga Barn, collects 15,000 gallons of rain water every winter in three concrete tanks buried on its premises, "that's enough to sustain 100% of our landscaping over the whole season," says Chris Avant, the company's president. And in the middle of the scale, residents like Andy Scheck, the publisher of the Lamorinda Weekly, use home-made systems to make the best possible use of the water that falls from our skies.

"When I came here from Germany, I was very surprised to notice that no one was collecting water from their gutters," says Scheck, "there, it is standard to have an outlet where the gutter comes down. Not everybody uses it, but the possibility is always there." Scheck decided to construct his own gutter-door in order to catch the winter rain. He first made a paper model for the door and cut an opening in the gutter; he then built a door, which is now attached to the gutter, from a sheet of metal. "I have a piece of pipe that I attach to the door to fill a large can located on the side of the house," he says, "once the first can is full, another pipe conducts the water to the next can."

Scheck's system does not have the storage capacity to fully meet his landscape watering needs, but the collected water is used from September to April and it somewhat reduces his water bill for the whole year.

Suzanne Jones, on the other hand, has a 10,000 gallon storage tank that catches enough water to maintain her native plant garden year round. When we remodeled our house, we buried a stainless steel tank under the deck," says the Bollinger Canyon resident, "it is connected to half

of our gutters." Jones was able to locate a Santa Rosa company that was ready to sell her the stainless steel tank, usually destined for wine storage, at a good price. "I wanted something recyclable and was glad to find this beautiful tank for only 10-20% more than a plastic tank." Jones plans to add a second tank in the future to sustain a vegetable garden. "When we re-did our plumbing system we made sure that it would be grey-water-recycling ready," adds Jones, "it will be easy to divert the water from our laundry to water our trees when we are ready to do so."

A do-it-yourself enthusiast, Scheck has also set in place a home-made grey-water recycling system. "It helps that the bathtub is set by a window," he says, "when the bath is over, we put the hose that sits outside the window in the tub and start a small pump." It takes five minutes to recover the water that is later used in the garden. "When the drought started last year it felt wrong to take baths," says Scheck's wife, Wendy, "this system is perfect and I enjoy my bath guilt-free."



Concrete tanks were buried by "The Barn" at the time of its renovation. Photo courtesy Canyon Construction

Rain and grey water stored in barrels provide all the water for the Scheck's vegetable garden



Andy Scheck with his bathtub pump system Photo Sophie Braccini

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