Christensen Landscape Services, LLC

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The Ivy

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Harvesting Rainwater

I woke to the pulsating rap of incessant rain pounding upon the skylight above my head. Heavy rain predicted to last for two days and nights. The ground is saturated and the pond has begun to overflow. It is the perfect time to talk about water conservation!

Saving water like saving money is often the last thing we think of when we are swimming in it. However, spring is the perfect time to put something away for a dry sunny day.

David and I recently toured the Philadelphia Flower Show. One of the recurring themes of the show was water conservation. Several displays illustrated methods of rain water harvesting.

Rainwater harvesting (according to the US EPA), collecting rainwater from impervious surfaces and storing it for later use, is a technique that has been used for millennia. Collecting rainwater for use during dry months in rain barrels or other depositories is an ancient and traditional practice. Historical records show that rainwater was collected in simple clay containers as far back as 2,000 years ago in Thailand, and throughout other areas of the world after that.

With the rising price of municipal water and drought restrictions now facing much of the United States during the summer months, more and more homeowners in our own modern society are turning to the harvesting of rainwater to save money and protect this precious natural resource. An easy and relatively inexpensive way for most homeowners to begin their own rainwater harvest system is through the use of rain barrels or in some cases underground cisterns.

Rainwater stored in rain barrels has many uses. Some people find it mostly useful for watering their landscapes and gardens. Others find uses within the house as well. Rainwater can also be used for drinking but requires special treatment with a filtration system. Note that many cities require the filtration system for drinking water to be certified and the water to be tested on a regular basis.

You do not need a filtration system for landscape uses. You can use it directly from your rain barrel on your flower gardens. A rain barrel is a container that stores water from the downspout of a rooftop gutter. They frequently have a spigot at the bottom that attaches to a garden hose and an overflow device to route excess water away from the foundation.

Installing a rain barrel, according to the CT DEP, can reduce the amount of storm water runoff and improve water quality in your community. Diverting runoff from your roof into a rain barrel reduces the amount of storm water being discharged into storm sewers that empty into nearby rivers, lakes and streams.

Collecting rooftop runoff in rain barrels and using it for watering flower gardens helps to control local flooding. It recharges local groundwater resources and protects rivers and streams from erosion. In addition it keeps pollutants found in paved areas from entering waterways.

Lawn and garden watering makes up nearly 40% of total household water use during the summer. A rain barrel collects water and stores it for when you need to water plants or wash a car. Rain barrels provide an ample supply of free "soft water" containing no chlorine, lime or calcium making it ideal for gardens, flowers or the potted plants.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, **a rain barrel can potentially save most homeowners about 1,300 gallons of water during the peak summer months.** Saving water not only helps protect the environment, it saves you money and energy by decreasing demand for treated tap water (i.e. reducing your monthly water bill). Since, diverting water from storm drains also decreases the impact of runoff to streams, it also reduces the need to build new storm water treatment facilities (i.e. reducing your future tax bill). Consequently, a rain barrel is an easy way for you to have a consistent supply of clean, fresh water for outdoor use and save money today and tomorrow.

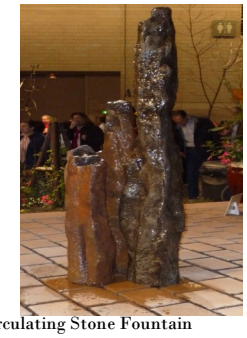
Displays at the Philadelphia flower show illustrated rain barrels, and downspout filters feeding into under ground cisterns. (see above right) One display used a recirculating fountain (right) using water from an underground cistern filled by a roof top rainwater harvesting system. Other displays used Rain Gardens created by harvesting roof top water, spilling it into a wetland containment garden, gradually filtering the water back into the local groundwater. (see right)

Happy Spring!

Donna Christensen

Rain Barrel by Rain Water Solutions

Downspout Filter from Aquarius Supply



Recirculating Stone Fountain

Christensen Landscape Services LLC

Members of Christensen Landscape Services spent many hours this winter attending educational seminars.

Diana Grabsch, Donna Christensen and Sarah Lathrop attended the 2010 Perennial Plant Conference held at the University of Connecticut in March

Christensen Landscape Services, LLC
P.O. Box 593
Northford CT 06472
Phone : 203-484-0424

Email addresses:

David Christensen	CONSTRUCTION	david@christensenlandscape.com
Donna Christensen	DESIGN	donna@christensenlandscape.com
Gerry Verrillo	MAINTENANCE	gerry@christensenlandscape.com
Kim Arbour	OFFICE	kim@christensenlandscape.com

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Pruning of Ornamental Shrubs and Young trees

Ornamental shrubs often suffer from incorrect pruning and or over pruning. This is usually done by homeowners in an attempt to control size, crowding or flowering. In our property reviews we find shrubs have developed branches which look like groups of brooms standing on end. This bunching of top growth is the shrub's reaction to severe cutting back at the growing points.

Over thinning, another common pruning mistake, leads to large groups of thin straight shoots or water sprouts and deadwood. This is often unsightly and creates disease prone plants. It is important to note that shrubs in this condition can often be restored to proper form by employing specific corrective pruning techniques.

Young trees in the landscape usually show the results of just the opposite. That is, no pruning is done at all. Trees which are newly planted and in the first few years in the landscape present us with the best opportunity to guide their form . Also, proper pruning can greatly affect the overall health of the tree as it matures. Their relatively small size allows for an efficient review . We look for competing branches, crowding and weak branch unions to name just a few of the potential problems . These can all be addressed by early corrective pruning. Proper care in the formative years of a newly planted tree will produce a healthier tree and protect your investment for many years to come.

By Gerry Verrillo,
Maintenance Manager, Licensed Arborist