

Santa Fe REAL ESTATE Guide

Artisan/craftsman/**builder**

OCTOBER 2004 VOLUME 8, ISSUE 7

How to harvest your rainwater

by Kurt Faust

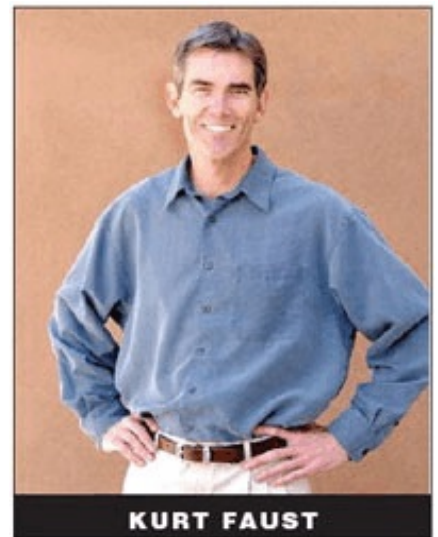
Now is an excellent time to think about harvesting rain water. Fall is a dry part of the year and a cistern installed now can be ready to capture the runoff from the coming winter snow and summer rains.

All systems have three features in common: a tank to hold the water, a way to get the water into the tank, and a way to deliver the water to its intended destination. The most simple system uses a barrel or above-ground tank sitting beneath a canale to catch the water as it falls. The tank can be fitted with a hose bib and garden hose which then can gravity-feed each location as need be.

In some situations you may need a gutter and/or downspout system to get the water into your tank. You can use the regular metal gutter materials or use PVC pipe. Some of our especially heavy summer rains come in real gushers but most of the moisture comes with considerably less volume and velocity. Plan to catch most of your water in a moderately sized trickle. The Japanese have a beautiful method of using a hanging chain as a down-spout to direct the water from the roof to the ground. This can help to keep the wind from blowing your run-off away from your container.

A buried tank will save room in your yard and can help control the hazards associated with an open tank. They come in many sizes ranging from 1,500 gallons to 10,000 gallons and more. To properly size your tank you need to know how much water you will use and how much area of rain fall is being collected. 1,000 square feet of roof will catch approximately 450 gallons of water with one inch of rain. We get most of our annual 12 inches of moisture in two distinct seasons with several dry months following each. Three or four months worth of storage for irrigation is a lot of water and a worth while goal.

To get the water into the underground tank requires some underground piping. One of my favorite systems uses a four-inch PVC pipe to collect the water from an 18 inch deep hole lined with plastic and filled with gravel. I use a 10-foot length of steel garden edging bent into a nice oval and placed at the surface of the well to keep dirt and grass from migrating into the hole. The water falls into the well from the roof and the large oval shape catches some of the gushers as well as the trickles.



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One of the best distribution methods is to connect to the drip irrigation so that it supplies water automatically when the timer calls for water. This should be equipped with a run-dry prevention gauge that stops the pump from running when the tank is empty. You can also set it up to switch over to your regular water supply when the tank is dry. Getting the water out of the tank can also be as simple as using a low-cost submersible pump with a garden hose attached to it.

Remember safety with your water harvesting. Protect children and critters from getting into your containers. Mosquitoes and bacteria in the water must be controlled and always apply the water underneath a bed of mulch; never let it pool openly on the ground.

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