

Rainwater Harvesting and You

Installing a rainwater harvesting system at your home is good for the environment, good for your plants, and good for your wallet -- up to \$1,000 of the cost may be credited to your next Arizona tax return!

Most Sierra Vista area residents love our stark but beautiful semi-arid landscape. We are not alone in this. Southeastern Arizona is one of the top ecotourism locations in the United States, as a result of the tremendous diversity of life found in our area. All of us – visitors and residents alike – recognize the magic of our mountains, grasslands, and river. But the survival of this diversity of life is tenuous, dependent on a limited amount of water that all of us – humans, animals, and plants – must share.

Virtually all water used in our area comes from groundwater, the same source feeding our “last-of-its-kind” San Pedro River. Every drop of groundwater we use is a drop that is not there for our river. As good stewards of our lands, we all want to reduce our use of this precious resource in order to protect the San Pedro River and the web of life it supports. Sierra Vista is making strides in this effort, but we can all do more and, in doing so, help protect Fort Huachuca, for the fort’s future is tied to the health of our river.



Rainwater barrel & tank at San Pedro House

The average landscape accounts for about half of household water consumption, so finding ways to reduce water use in landscaping is a great place to start. One way to do this is through the capture of rainwater for use in landscaping.

Rainwater harvesting can be as simple as sculpting the landscape around your home to catch and guide rainwater from your roof and driveway into rock or soil basins that hold the rainwater until it has time to soak into the ground. The deeper and wider the basin, the more water it can hold. This is called “passive” rainwater harvesting.

Other techniques allow you to save captured rainwater for later use, and there are a great variety of these “active” rainwater harvesting techniques. The most popular relies on using gutters to capture and guide the rainwater from a roof to a downspout that directs the water into a rainwater barrel, tank, or cistern for storage. This water is then used for supplemental watering of landscape plants and gardens. If enough water is captured, it can also be used for outdoor water features.

Your plants will thank you for using rainwater, since it is superior to tap water in terms of meeting a plant’s needs. You may have noticed this when you have seen how quickly your landscaping perks up once our summer rains begin, even if you have been diligently watering with tap water all spring. When using rainwater, you are not only a better steward of the environment but you are also providing your plants with a healthier water source.



Passive irrigation system at University of Arizona

The State of Arizona considers rainwater harvesting to be so important that it has established an annual fund to provide you with a tax credit of up to **25 percent** (up to \$1,000) of the cost of creating a rainwater harvesting system on your property. All you have to do is obtain the simple, one-page form to request your tax credit, fill it out, and mail it in along with the receipts for the items you purchased to establish your system. Within a few days, you'll receive a notice crediting you a specific amount toward your next state tax return.

The specifics on this program can be found at www.azdor.gov. Click on "credit pre-certification" on the left side of the home page. Click on "water conservation systems credit" for details on this program. Act quickly because annual funds are limited!

For more information on rainwater harvesting, visit the experts at the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Water Wise program, at www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/waterwise.

Another helpful website for supplies and rainwater harvesting information can be found at www.harvestingrainwater.com.

Three local examples of rainwater harvesting systems supporting xeric (low water use) landscapes can be seen at the City of Sierra Vista Nancy J. Brua Animal Care Center, the University of Arizona South (UAS) campus, and the San Pedro House (SPH). The Animal Care Center features a 2500-gallon tank with a special pump switch that ensures the irrigation system isn't interrupted if rainwater is not available for the plants. The UAS site features four different water catchment systems (a corrugated culvert, 2500-gallon tank, 55-gallon barrel system, and a converted 160-gallon watering trough), as well as passive techniques. For information on the UAS site, contact the Water Wise program. The Community Xeriscape at the SPH uses solar energy to power a drip irrigation system, using rainwater from a 1550-gallon tank to provide supplemental water to the native plants in their landscape. It employs both bark and gravel mulch, and even includes a native grass "lawn." The Community Xeriscape also uses passive harvesting. For more information on the Community Xeriscape, visit the Friends of the San Pedro River website at www.sanpedroriver.org.



Community Xeriscape