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Resident installs cistern to save rain in drought

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Steve Patton expects to start using rainwater from a 1,000 gallon cistern that filled up after just a couple of inches of rain fell earlier this week.

Five years ago, Patton read a book about a person in Texas who collected rainwater to use at home. That got him thinking about harvesting rain. He hopes to use the rain he's collecting to flush toilets, shower and do laundry.

"It's such a prevalent practice in the rest of the world," Patton said.

Upstate Forever and Carolina Garden World are hosting a July 19 workshop teaching people how to collect and use rainwater. The registration fee is \$50, and each attendee will get a rain barrel valued at \$100.

Ned Barrett, Upstate Forever's program manager, said it's time for people to recognize the importance of conservancy and taking advantage of free water sources.

"Making use of those free sources of water is a sense that we're becoming aware," Barrett said. "What's making us aware of gasoline is our pockets, but water isn't going to work that way."

Scott Stapleton with Ascot Landscape Management in Greer, who installed Patton's cistern, does the same across the Southeast. He said cisterns are becoming common with new construction. Stapleton recommends that people begin collecting water in a rain barrel before advancing to a cistern like Patton's.

Stapleton said 50 percent of water used in the United States is for irrigation, and the water collected in a rain barrel is ideal for watering lawns and plants because of the nitrogen in rain.

Patton plans to have a filter installed next week that will make the water clean for bathing, flushing the toilet and laundry. He said the water would have to be sterilized if it's going to be used for drinking. He gets water from a well that he describes as

being shallow.

He said he'll still use the well for drinking water.

Water flows to the cistern from Patton's gutters.

He said his roof is 680 square feet and 2 inches of rain from earlier in the week filled the cistern. Stapleton said people often ask how the system works during a drought, like the one the Upstate is experiencing.

"The concept works great and works during any level of drought," Stapleton said, because of the gallons of water that can be collected after a quick shower. Stapleton said rain barrels and cisterns also collect water from condensation.

Patton's main tip for anyone considering harvesting rain is to start conserving water before installing a cistern. He said he and his wife use an average of 50 gallons of water a day.

The average person uses 80 to 100 gallons of water a day, according to the United States Geological Survey.

"They need to get really serious about conservation so they won't overload the system," Patton said.

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