



Saving it from a rainy day

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

The energy crunch has rightly fueled calls for old-fashioned conservation. But in our state, we're not just running short on low-cost energy sources. We're running short on water. And as conservation methods go, saving rainwater is about as old-fashioned as you can get.

Fortunately for residents of the Charleston area, we haven't experienced the extreme rainfall shortfall that has drastically lowered water levels — and agricultural production — in the Upstate in recent years, including this one. Yet over time, drought conditions in the upper part of our state could affect our water supplies. They already have lowered Lake Moultrie by a remarkable amount.

However, drought conditions also have raised awareness of traditional solutions to that problem. As The Greenville News reported last week, a growing number of Upstate residents and businesses have been retaining rainwater with "methods once used by Romans and Maya Indians to collect and store water in dry times."

For instance, Spartanburg's Ned Barrett has been watering his plants without running up his water bill thanks to the plentiful supply he accumulated in a 55-gallon rain barrel. Steve Patton, a gardener in Spartanburg, has nearly 20 times that much saved in a 1,000-gallon cistern, which collected rainwater from a spout off of his roof.

Mr. Patton, who also plans to start using that water for washing, bought his storage container from Greer's Scott Stapleton, who now sells "rain harvesting" products from his Ascot Earth Systems store.

Even with precipitation dropping to historically low levels in the Upstate, there's still been enough to provide lots of rainwater to those who know how to efficiently capture it.

Mr. Barrett, who's affiliated with the environmental group Upstate Forever, told the News that one inch of rainwater collected on the roof of a 1,000-square foot house can produce 600 gallons.

It's a time-tested practical solution. When water gets short, do as the Romans did — and the Upstaters do.

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