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Harvesting Water

Q: We're thinking about building a rainwater collection tank under our home to reduce our dependence on municipal water, but we've heard that they sometimes cause more problems than they solve. What do I need to know before deciding to install one, and how do I know if it's the right solution for my home?

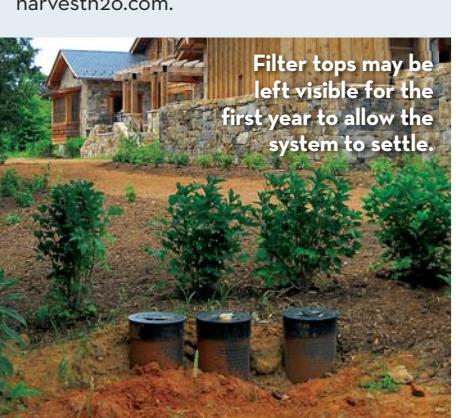
A: "I think most people, even apartment dwellers, should catch rain," says Doug Pushard, secretary of the board of directors for the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA) and owner of Harvest H2O, a rainwater collection systems building company and industry information source. "It helps prevent storm runoff, saves energy and provides better water for drinking and irrigation." Water served by a municipal source, he says, is treated with chlorine, which is not ideal for plants, while stored rainwater maintains itself with little outside interference.

Before you plan your system, he advises, go to your city or county planning department to check on local regulations and permits as well as incentive programs and rebates. Also, build with an accredited company that has experience building the kind of system you want. ARCSA accreditation requires that companies take a rigorous test to prove their working knowledge and attend continuing education classes each year. You'll avoid problems such as incorrect tank size, and filter and pump issues if you work with, or at least consult, a professional.

"Most people think there's a lot of maintenance involved, and there's really not that much," says Pushard. "Clean your filters regularly, clear out your gutter screens at least once or twice a year, and get an annual inspection to make sure your vents and overflows are clean. The tank itself might not need to be cleaned for a decade or two. If properly constructed and maintained, a good system could provide you all the water you need for 50 to 100 years."

For more information, visit arcsa.org or harvest2o.com.

Formerly
The LOG & TIMBER HOME SEMINAR
Photo by Joseph Hilliard



Lifestyle Kitchen Design

Time and again, surveys show that the kitchen, not the great room, is where people spend most of their time at home. There's something inviting about the aroma of food simmering on the stove and the warmth of something baking in the oven, so families and guests alike tend to congregate in this heart of any home. Design yours to be as practical and accommodating as possible with these three tips.

1. Spend time thinking about how you will use your kitchen, and make sure the design meshes with your goals. If you're planning to entertain, an open design that flows into other rooms will be the most welcoming. If you want to maximize your other rooms and don't use the kitchen very elaborately, a smaller, more efficient design might be best for you.

2. Minimizing your kitchen's work triangle between the refrigerator, sink and stove might seem obvious, but don't forget to consider your space's other necessary elements. If you keep those three components close together, will you have to walk around the counter each time you need to get to your pantry? Will your trash can stick out into the room, or is there room to build it under a counter? Adding a central island with more cabinets, counter space and a prep sink may solve these problems.

3. Do you shop fresh every day or stock up for weeks in advance? Do you eat out for most of your meals or cook frequently at home? Taking a close look at your shopping and eating habits will help you decide how much storage you need. Also, think through how you will use your storage. Overhead cabinets often offer lots of space, but do you want to break out a stepstool each time you reach for a box of cereal? Decide where you will store your food and dishes prior to starting construction so you won't be stuck with any unwelcome surprises.

Visit kitchens.com/design for common kitchen layouts, advice on the work triangle, an overview of different design styles and more.

—Danielle Taylor



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