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RAINWATER HARVESTING - HARVEST REAL BENEFITS
by Paul M. Carroll

Given its importance to the existence of life, the question should not be why harvest water but rather why not. While our population spirals, creating an ever increasing demand for the precious commodity, the water cycle remains unchanged as does the amount of fresh water that we have available for domestic, industrial and agricultural uses. It therefore becomes increasingly necessary for us to become better custodians of the less than .01% of all water resources that is available as fresh unpolluted water. Water harvesting should not be seen therefore as an option, but as a necessary strategy in combating the effects of climate change and contributing to food security.

Rainwater harvesting is nothing new but has generally been viewed as an activity practiced by rural folk in situations where there is no central/piped supply or easily accessible rivers or springs. Naturally, those who have experienced rural living will be much more appreciative of the importance of water harvesting and the need for conservation of water resources as a part of daily life. However, as urban areas become more susceptible to droughts, the need for wider application of water harvesting and policy to promote this practice, is gaining traction. The spiraling cost of piped water and increasing scarcity now presents real challenges for institutions and individuals alike.

It is incumbent on those who have come to the realisation of the impending water crisis, to promote and foster the harvesting of rain and floodwaters for the many purposes that do not require expensive treated/piped water. Activities such as flushing, watering of green spaces, parks and gardens, maintenance and washing cars can be carried out just as or more effectively, using harvested rain water or storm water run off. In fact, rainwater is much better for watering as the chlorine frequently used for treating domestic water supply can be harmful to plants. Harvesting storm water by establishment of settling basins presents an opportunity to not only improve availability of fresh water but also recover valuable eroded topsoil, which is for the most part washed out to sea during periods of heavy rainfall, damaging coastal resources.

While we may not easily be able to halt global climate change and its impact on the availability of fresh water we can help to lay the foundation for sustainability of future generations by adopting policies that lead to improvement of water harvesting in all its forms. Now is the time to ensure that water harvesting is not just a smart idea promoted by a few enlightened but one that is incorporated in our planning of new communities while retrofitting existing communities to actualise potential social, environmental and economic benefits.

Through our membership in the IRHA we look forward to becoming a contributor to the global movement, influencing development of needed policy at the local level through outreach and becoming better equipped to assist stakeholders in the implementation of water harvesting systems.

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