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## Even after recent storms, locals work to save water

By Diane Claytor



Ellen (pictured right) and Larry Beans get two 1,000-gallon drums delivered to their Moraga home. Photos provided

recalls, "and we harvested that water, as well as washing machine rinse water and shower water, to use in our garden. Conserving has always been a part of our lifestyle," she explains.

Even with a fairly drought-tolerant garden, the Beans watched their water bill increase so Ellen Beans began looking for additional ways to save water. The more she learned, the more interested she became in collecting rainwater. She examined their roof and concluded that "we could get the most bang for the buck by taking water from the largest section of the roof." They reconfigured the gutters and the pipes coming down from the gutters so that all the water from that section ran off from one of the corners. Larry Beans purchased two 50-gallon drums, which he connected so that when one was full, water would flow to the other one. He was also collecting pickle buckets from a local restaurant's trash, using them to take water from the drums and then watering their plants. "I had buckets with water and pickle juice watering the garden," he said jokingly.

Late last year, the Beans decided it was time to "go bigger." More research and Ellen Beans determined they could fit two 500-gallon drums in their side yard. But Larry Beans said, "If we're going to do it, let's really do it." After much convincing, "Larry won out," Ellen Beans admits, proudly showing off their two 1,000-gallon drums, installed in December. Pipes connect the two huge drums together; overflow is directed to an already-existing underground pipe connected to their sewer system.

Ellen Beans estimates that it would take about 10 hours to empty both drums using an ordinary garden hose. "I'm under no illusion that we'll have water for the summer," she notes, "but we should be able to deeply water our trees and shrubs in the spring and even return some water to the water table." She'll use a hose connected to the drums to water most of her front and back gardens.

Larry Beans reports that they have the option of tying the harvested water to their irrigation system as well as the possibility of having it piped into their house. "It felt like a really good investment because there are so many opportunities for additional uses," he said. "It's also an investment in our environment."

Ellen Beans adds that she's very glad they started with the 50-gallon barrels. "We learned so much starting off small," she declares.

Bobbie Preston, another longtime Moraga resident, has been harvesting rainwater for several years. But while the Beans' system is large, costly and sophisticated, Preston uses nine 33-gallon garbage cans with lids (to prevent mosquito breeding, she explains) and non-perforated drainage tubes hooked to the downspouts to harvest water off her roof; a sump pump connected to a hose pumps the water into her garden.

"This provides enough runoff for me to water the entire front yard and most of the back," Preston says. "It is by far the lowest tech, least convenient system but it's also the least costly and easiest to do," she states. "In fact," she adds with a smile, "the garbage cans are the most expensive part of the process."

The downside of this system, Preston admits, "is having to go out in the rain to switch the drainage tubes from a full to an empty barrel."

Like the Beans, Preston is an avid conservationist. She says the water table in Moraga is sinking

Bomb cyclone. Atmospheric river. Pineapple Express. Whatever name weather forecasters gave the recent Bay Area storms, it amounted to one thing: a huge amount of rain falling very quickly in a relatively short time span.

In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR) last month, UC Santa Cruz professor, Andrew Fisher, said that with rain falling so quickly, we lack the ability to set water aside fast enough in a spot where it can be stored for future use. "It's not as simple as putting out a big bucket," Fisher declared.

At least two Moraga households may beg to differ with Professor Fisher's bucket statement.

Larry and Ellen Beans, self-proclaimed activists and environmentalists, are longtime Moraga residents. Ellen Beans remembers they really learned how to save water during the extreme drought in 1974. "Water came down the hillside across the street from our Marin house," she

substantially and groundwater everywhere is decreasing. "We need to save the water table and not waste water," she emphatically states.

Preston's main impetus for collecting rainwater is a belief that we're going to have drought conditions for a long time. And perhaps even more significant, she says, "The idea of useful water going down the drain and having to be treated along with sewage water when we could be using it just offends me."

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