

March 18, 2020



Stretching Your Water -- with Rain and Reuse
By Alice Cantelow
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Uh-oh. Drought is being forecast again...

You have free water on your property. Are you ready to use it? There are two kinds, both of which are available to just about everyone: rainwater, and greywater. Yes Virginia, both of those can be used legally in California. And yes, periodic droughts are part of California life, so these two alternative water sources are worth developing even if this isn't the year that full-on drought returns.

A surprising amount of rainwater falls not only on your house, but also on your shed, carport, etc. And even in our county, with our long dry summers, that rainwater can be a big boost to your garden.

Of course, you can divert rainwater to a rain barrel, save it for summer, use that small amount on a plant, and then poof -- it's gone! But take heart. This method is just a tiny (and less effective) tip of the iceberg compared to what you could be doing. Much larger amounts can be collected with hardscape installations like earthworks and rain gardens. And if you time it right, collecting and diverting rainwater in the shoulder seasons of spring and fall, you can use the rainwater in a barrel and then collect it again quickly in the same barrel. And again, and again. This way, just one 55-gallon barrel can save you hundreds of gallons of water. And if you connect several together....

Or perhaps you want to go all the way and install a large tank. You'd be amazed at how quickly rain on a relatively small roof surface can fill it!

The other free source of water is greywater, that lightly used water you send to your sewer or septic system that could be sent to certain plants instead. This does NOT include toilet or kitchen water, but can include water from your bathroom, laundry, and utility sink. There are specific

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regulations to make sure greywater is used correctly, and permits are often required. The biggest mistake people make is trying to store it. Greywater used at a single residence should ideally go straight to a wood chip basin around shrubs or trees, and, unlike rainwater, should not be collected in a tank. Storing greywater can lead to foul smells and unsafe conditions; it only works on a large scale with careful treatment, as is done in some towns and cities.

Master gardener Alice Cantelow will give a three-hour presentation Saturday, March 21, from 9 AM to 12 noon on using both rainwater and greywater for the yard, with practical information, local examples, and discussion of current regulations. Fight those “dry winter” blues by making plans for more sustainable, and cheaper, use of that oh-so-precious resource, water. The class will be held at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Space is limited so arrive early.

Mark your calendar for the Master Gardener Plant Sale on April 18 from 8am to 2pm at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.