

Rainwater User Says It's Hard To Beat

By Mick Lane, Contributing Editor

Richard Heinichen and his wife have been collecting rainwater for household use for years. When they started, it was the answer to bad water problems. Since then, they've come to believe rain water is the best water you can get.

The Heinichens had spent \$5,000 for a well to serve their new home in the Hill Country outside Austin, Texas, only to find the water "rock hard" with a high sulfur content. He says it turned their hair into fright wigs and their jeans into cardboard. The equipment and chemicals needed to treat this water were daunting and the cost was downright prohibitive. They considered hooking up with a private water supplier, but again, they didn't like the prospect of paying hundreds of dollars a month for the rest of their lives for water. Rainwater collection was a last resort.

Despite an initial investment in gutters, plumbing, filters and storage tanks, Heinichen figures rainwater costs less and is better for them than any other water source available to them.

"Now, after years of living with rainwater, we realize choosing rainwater is not 'settling' for less in any sense. Rainwater is 'the gold standard' of water. It has a hardness of zero, tastes fresh, and leaves our faucets and tile sparkling," he says.

In Texas Hill Country, rainfall averages about 32 in. a year. The Heinichens collect everything that runs off the 2,300 sq. ft. roof of their home. That small a collection area may sound a little inadequate, but they actually catch and store more than 40,000 gal. of water in a typical year. That's enough to allow them about 110 gal. of water a day for all purposes.

The experience has turned Heinichen into a rainwater evangelist. He's written a book on catching and using rainwater. He formed a company he calls Tank Town and sells tanks, filters and other equipment related to storing and using rainwater. And he recently became the first and only person selling bottled rainwater for drinking.

Of the bottled water, he has this to say: "My mission was to create a bottled water that captured the taste and sense of the cold, clear stream water I drank in the late 1950's in the California mountains. After years of wrangling with government agencies, we finally agreed on regulations that would allow me to collect and bottle rainwater—for the first time in the whole United States."

Heinichen says his product has an advantage over other bottled waters: "I don't have to try to convince you that my spring is better than their spring or rely on a gimmick like



Heinichen "harvests" and stores more than 40,000 gal. of rainwater every year.

hauling a glacier behind a tugboat to my bottling plant. Move over spring water, glacier water, whatever water - this is rainwater and it has never hit the ground," he asserts.

If you're interested in collecting your own rainwater in volumes sufficient for household use, Heinichen can help you determine how much collection area and storage you need and design the right system of filters, pumps and even add ultraviolet water treatment if it's needed.

If you just want a good drink of clean, fresh water, he'll be happy to sell you his "fresh squeezed cloud juice" for \$25 per case of 24

pint bottles delivered by UPS anywhere in the U.S. (or \$12 if you pick it up). His book, which should help most people design and equip their own system, sells for \$19.95 plus \$3 for S&H. See his online catalog for tank and equipment prices.

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Rain "Harvester" Gets Water Supply From His Roof

By Janis Schole, Contributing Editor

Retired master plumber Robert Foley is reaping the rewards of his economical system for storing rainwater, and he's eager to show others how to do what he's done.

The Bandera, Texas man says his water tastes great and tests have shown it's cleaner than city water. Even in last year's big Texas flood, when he got more than 24 in. of rain in a month, Foley never had to compromise like others who were handicapped by broken water lines and contaminated municipal drinking water.

"While other people were buying bottled water, or adding chlorine to their wells, I was able to help out my neighbors by giving them drinking water from my system," Foley says. "The flood was still a terrible experience but at least I could wake up, flush, get a shower and make coffee like any other day."

When he set up his system, Foley says he knew that with the normal annual rainfall in his area of 31 in. he could collect 20,000 gal. of fresh water per year from the rooftop of his home. He had grown tired of the taste and smell of the heavily chlorinated water supplied by his municipal system. He says it was also hard with a capital "H".

"Why not tap into an ongoing supply of soft, free rainwater?" he asked himself at the time.

Foley was able to build his entire rain gathering system for under \$2,000, using his existing rain gutters. He connected the gutters to a water line which transports the rainwater to the first of a series of eight interconnected 120-gal. storage tanks.

He was able to get the tanks for free, since they were pressure tanks that had developed small holes. Before using them, Foley patched the holes with metal epoxy and then mounted them on a concrete pad. He added a large plastic storage tank for a total capacity of 2,150 gal. All tanks are plumbed together by 1 1/4-in. PVC pipe.

"I used a 1/2 hp shallow-well jet pump and a 5-gal. pressure tank set at 50 psi to pressurize the system."

To get purified drinking water, Foley built



Robert Foley's plumbing experience helped him design his system. He has since written a book called, "It's Raining - You're Storing" to help others set up similar systems.

a "rain washer," (which he describes in detail in a book he has published), and then added a 25-micron filter canister, a five-micron filter, a high intensity ultraviolet light to kill any remaining bacteria, and one more five-micron carbon filter. He admits the water was already clean before the last filter, but he included it just to improve the taste a touch more. This system meets all of his domestic needs.

Foley's plumbing experience helped him in planning his piping system, but he says anyone could set up a similar system. To assist others that are interested in taking advantage of the free supply of rainwater, he has written the book, "It's Raining - You're Storing."

"It's very explicit and has numerous illustrations, making it easy to understand," he says.

For orders within the U.S., Foley charges \$26 per copy, including shipping. Foreign orders are \$31, including shipping. All payments must be in the form of money orders.

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From the gutters, rainwater runs into eight interconnected 120-gal. storage tanks.

Farm Water Reservoir Minimizes Risk

Roger Van Hecke knows that in his area a dependable supply of water can make or break a farm. He likes to feel as secure as he can which is what motivated him to set up a 6,300-gal. above-ground water reservoir on his Busby, Alberta cow-calf operation. That translates into a three-day supply of water, in case anything ever goes wrong with his wells.

Van Hecke spent \$15,000 to install three 2,100-gal. plastic water tanks that sit on rubber mats on a cement floor inside a shed connected to his pump house.

He has two wells (one at the barn and one at the house) plumbed to the tanks. By using valves, he can control which well he taps into for any given purpose (pressure washing, etc.), so as not to put too much pressure on any one of them. The tank connections are parallel, and he has it set up so that the wells are not taxed too heavily for filling the tanks, either.

The barn well is a 3-gal. per minute producer and the house well a 1-gal. per minute. But Van Hecke sets them to produce 1 gal. and 3/4 gal. per minute, respectively. His



Plastic tanks allow Van Hecke to see water levels at all times.

cows drink about 2,000 gal. per day.

Because the tanks are plastic, he can quickly and easily see where the water level is at any time. The tops of the tanks are very close to the ceiling, so he doesn't worry about his children falling into them.

Van Hecke says that besides providing a safety net, the reservoir system also increases the value of his farm if he ever had to leave it.

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