

Talk of the Town: Save water outdoors



Courtesy photo

Two 50-gallon rain barrels supply free water for a small garden.

Fred Oswald, Special to the Courier

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In our April 1 column, the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) discussed why water conservation is really important and the need for a sustainable water management plan that will ensure a stable water supply for generations to come without causing environmental, economic or social damage.

Proposed solutions focus too much on increasing our water supply via a pipeline that would harm the upper Verde River, unless the impact of pumping is offset by a not-yet-designed mitigation plan.

The municipal water supply for both Prescott and Prescott Valley is pumped from underground aquifers. Those aquifers also contribute a significant amount of water to springs and streams in this region. If we continue to pump too much groundwater, those springs and streams will eventually become dry washes. That would have a devastating impact on both the habitat and wildlife that depend on surface water.

In the quad-city area, we are using water at several times the natural recharge rate. The impact of this overdraft includes declining water levels in the aquifer and wells drying up in the western part of Chino Valley.

Each American, on average, uses over 100 gallons of water per day. With a little care, water use can be reduced by over two-thirds. For example, about 27 percent of our water in Prescott is used for landscaping and is lost to the aquifer. We can save most of this drinking-quality water by replacing thirsty vegetation with drought-tolerant plants and by irrigating with rainwater collected and stored (harvested) in rain barrels or larger tanks.

Conservation can play a major role in achieving a sustainable water supply. This column shows simple steps homeowners can take to use captured rainwater and attractive drought-tolerant plants to save both water and money.

Drought-tolerant plants can survive with little or no watering. Many of these plants are quite attractive, and these are the plants that belong in Arizona. You can see examples at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation (GPUU), 882 Sunset Ave. (where CWAG meets), two blocks behind the True Value Hardware store, or see the Low Water Use Drought Tolerant Plant List at www.prescott-az.gov/d/plant_list.pdf.

Rainwater doesn't contain chlorine, lime, or calcium, which makes it ideal for watering flowers and vegetable gardens. Using stored rainwater will lower your water bill. You can supplement harvested rain by saving water used to wash fruits and vegetables: catch it in a bowl and then pour it on your plants.

Rain barrels come in various sizes from about 50 to over 1,000 gallons. Smaller barrels can be "daisy chained" to provide more storage. You can see examples of larger systems at GPUU and at the Adult Center of Prescott, 1280 E Rosser St.

Smaller barrels can be purchased from stores or online, or a low-cost barrel can be made from a used 50-gallon plastic food-grade drum. For recommendations, see "Fred's Rainwater Harvesting Tips" in the "Current Issues" box on the CWAG home page at www.cwagaz.org.

A video of the April CWAG program, "Everything You Need to Know About Rainwater Harvesting!" is available at cwagaz.org/videos. The City of Prescott also has some excellent ideas at prescottwatersmart.com. Another good resource is "Harvesting Rainwater for Landscape Use" by Patrica Waterfall. You can download it at cwagaz.org/images/Reports/RefLib/RWH-Landscape.pdf.

With a little care, we can save significant water in our homes, protect the aquifer and save money on our water bills.

On Saturday, May 14, from 10 a.m. to about noon, CWAG will conduct a guided tour of several sites using rainwater harvesting and low-water-use landscaping in Prescott. To provide the best experience for everyone, the tour is limited to 30 people. There is no charge but preregistration is required. To preregister, please send an email to info@cwagaz.org or call 928-445-4218. More details are at www.cwagaz.org.

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