



CONSERVING WATER



Clockwise from top left: A mandevilla flower blooms in the garden of Villages residents Dick and Rochelle Holcombe. The Holcombes use rain barrels to keep their garden irrigated. One barrel is decorated with a mountain and lake scene, while the other has a large tree painted on its surface. The Holcombes found a carwash business selling off old 55-gallon plastic barrels that were once used to store detergent. Steppingstones lead the way in the couple's yard.

Photos by Mark DiOrio / Daily Sun

VILLAGERS MAKE, DECORATE THEIR OWN RAIN BARRELS TO KEEP THEIR GARDEN WATERED

By CAROLINE KLAPPER
DAILY SUN

THE VILLAGES —

Hauling a watering can around the garden this summer was getting to be tiring for Village of Woodbury residents Dick and Rochelle Holcombe.

As the weather got hotter and little rain was falling, Rochelle said, she was getting out the watering can or hose at least every other day to keep her flowers from wilting away.

"We have a lot of plants that can't survive on once-a-week watering," she said. "I was using a lot of the house water. We were interested in conserving water."

"We just didn't want to waste so much water," Dick added. Looking for a solution, the Holcombes turned to Jim Davis, Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Extension agent with University of Florida IFAS. Davis suggested they invest in some rain barrels, which are used to store rainwater runoff from a home's roof to provide supplement irrigation.

The only difficulty was that ready-made rain barrels are often difficult to find, but the Holcombes came up with their own



Mark DiOrio / Daily Sun

These days, Rochelle Holcombe is no longer watering her flowers with water from the house. Instead she hooks up her hose to a rain barrel and has more than enough water to keep her plants from getting thirsty.

BARRELS, from E1

solution. They found a car-wash business selling off old 55-gallon plastic barrels that were once used to store detergent.

After thoroughly cleaning out the barrels, Dick got to work creating his first rain barrel.

In order to make a viable rain barrel, he had to drill a hole near the bottom of the barrel and install a spigot. The spigot is where a watering can or hose could be hooked up to remove water from the barrel.

To create a platform for the barrel under one of the downspouts on the house, Dick used cinder blocks.

Once the barrel was positioned, Dick cut off the bottom half of the downspout, and using a flexible downspout extender, he connected the

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT RAIN BARRELS

contact the Southwest Florida Water Management District at 800-423-1476 or watermatters.org.

end of the downspout to a hole he'd made in the top of the barrel.

Taking the design even further, Dick added a fine mesh screen over the ends of the extender to keep leaves and other debris from getting into the barrel. The screens can be removed, rinsed, and placed back onto the end of the extender.

But once Dick had finished constructing the rain barrels, they still didn't seem finished.

Although he'd painted the barrels gray to match the color of the house, he decided they needed a more artistic touch.

"I'm not an artist. I never have painted anything in my entire life," he said. "I don't know why I did it. I just picked up a paintbrush."

Now instead of regular plain rain barrels, Dick's artistic streak has resulted in two attractive works of art on each corner of the back of the house. One barrel is decorated with a mountain and lake scene, while the other has a large tree painted on its surface.

"All I cared about was that they were the same color as the house, so they would blend in, but he started painting," Rochelle said, smiling as she talked about the end product. "He's always thinking of something to do."

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plants from getting thirsty.

Only about a half an inch of rain is enough to fill a 55-gallon barrel, and even after having the rain barrels for a month, Dick said they have definitely cut down on their home water usage.

"If everybody was saving water like this, it would make a tremendous difference," he said.

As for his stint as an artist, Dick said he probably won't be picking up a paintbrush again anytime soon, but Rochelle said the neighbors have noticed his handiwork and are already making requests.

"They keep saying, 'Would you make one for me?'" she said, smiling.

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