

# 50plus Handyman



## Saving and collecting water

**With water shortages in the south of the country a hot topic of conversation 50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick discusses practical ways of saving and collecting water.**

To those of you north of a line between the Severn and the Wash I apologise as you probably have plentiful supplies. Down here in the barren south the aquifers and reservoirs are running remarkably low, many 'bournes' (from winterbournes meaning winter streams) have been running dry since last summer, drought orders are in force and there is talk (horror of horrors) of not being able to water even the cricket pitches.

So for gardeners a real crisis may be just around the corner. Now it hasn't stopped raining of course and as I write this in darkest Buckinghamshire thunderstorms are forecast. Depending on your point of view it either hasn't rained enough, the water companies haven't captured enough of the wet stuff or have such poor distribution systems that much of what is pumped in flows out long before it reaches our homes. Thames Water's PR department are still blaming pipe damage caused by the blitz; yes the one in the 1940's.

We should I suppose all do our bit (and that doesn't mean writing a strongly worded note to your MP about privatised companies and leaks although a bit of pressure on Ofwat may help). If you live in London though do write to Ken and tell him to stop blocking the desalination plant plan.

On a more practical note both using less and capturing water for use is quite an easy task. Water saving tips are widely available on the web. The <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk> site has good practical advice. What is more interesting is how to obtain more water in one's own garden. Now one can drill a borehole, or better still employ a man and a machine to do it, as the average DIY drill bit isn't quite long enough. Be prepared to fork out between £5,000 and £15,000 to get a working system but note that you don't need a license if you draw less than 20,000 litres a day. A typical person will use around 125 litres a day, up incidentally by some 70% in the last 30 years.

If you are not prepared to go this far then a few simpler methods can be employed. The most common is to use the water collection method built into your house, the roof and gutters and divert water away from the corporation drain and into your own storage facility. This typically involves inserting a simple device into one or more down pipes and diverting the water thus captured to a storage facility, usually a water butt but possibly a pond or both. In grander schemes an underground storage facility can be built. The cleverer designers divert all the water to a butt first and when this is full to the pond or a secondary storage facility or back to the drains. This system has the added benefit that the butt acts as a filter for debris and provides a ready filling point for watering cans or a hose connection. Water snails often move in to assist with water quality but so do mosquitoes, which don't. Remember that overflowing water butts next to the house can cause damp so some form of overflow dispersion is required.

The key component is the down pipe filter or diverter. These cost just a few pounds. Personal experience has indicated that they all work but most also block up from time to time, necessitating removal and cleaning. The way to minimise this is prevent debris such as leaves or moss from the roof getting into the down pipe. This can be achieved by fitting a simple mesh or floating filter in the gutter outlet (where

the down pipe connects). For larger amounts of leaves the mesh is best, but the gutter will need clearance from time to time. Most are available from garden centres.

So some pipe work and one or more water butts can provide a simple but effective water collection and storage facility and with some easy additions a pond feed or indeed an automatic watering system can be created.

For the more adventurous think of using both the front and rear gutters and any other roofs such as a detached garage or an underground storage facility with filters and a pump system. Or just try a rain dance.

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