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To the relief of all Wakulla County Residents, the rainy season finally started in May. But with the return of much needed rain comes the question of how to handle storm water runoff?

The typically heavy summer rains in Florida combined with our porous soils to create the potential for leaching and groundwater pollution. Pollutants have a chance to accumulate in storm water runoff when the rain is not absorbed where it falls.

The pollutants may include petro-chemicals, excess fertilizer and pesticides, and leached organic matter. Floridians obtain most of their drinking water from ground water sources, so the problem affects everyone.

The Florida Cooperative Extension Service has initiated the Florida Friendly Yards program to assist every homeowner make every raindrop count as a positive influence on the aquifer.

It is a basic concept that rain which falls in a yard should soak into the yard. After all, rain is the best water source for Florida landscapes. Given the price of water from a utility company, rain is literally pennies from heaven, or at least the troposphere.

Compacted soils required for construction may present a challenge to rain absorption. A little planning and preparation can help improve the success in this area.

Consider these practical tips:

Down spouts - if your roof has rain gutters, aim the downspouts at a porous surface so water can soak into the soil. Be sure the plants in the area can adapt to wet/dry extremes.



Earth Shaping – incorporate attractive, functional contours into your landscape. Swales and berms will help divert runoff that would otherwise rush from your yard. Waterfront yards may want to employ both swales and berms to control runoff into ponds and streams.

Densely growing turf or ground cover will prove especially useful to discourage erosion, capture rain and filter nutrients. A maintenance-free zone of native wetland plants will make waterfront yard more effective.

Rain barrels offer the homeowner a way to save rain for the dry season and periodic droughts. The barrels have a hole on the lid that accepts the snuggly fitting downspout. A spout near the bottom allows the homeowner to fill a can or attach a hose.



Cisterns are an ancient technology which accomplishes the same goal as a rain barrels. They can be constructed from several different materials. If a top is not used the homeowner may want to use *Bacillus thuringiensis* to prevent mosquito infestation.

Porous surfaces should be used whenever possible for traffic areas such as driveways, walkways, and patios. Materials such as gravel, mulch and pervious concrete will allow rainwater to seep into the ground. A positive byproduct will be that the porous surfaces will act as filter if any runoff is captured.

One caution is that water is not channeled or retained next to a structure or building. Chronically damp soil can promote the establishment and growth of wood destroying insects.

By making every raindrop count a homeowner can accomplish several goals. A cleaner aquifer will result, a greener lawn and landscape will be promoted, and the monthly water bill will be lower. All are good events.

For more information on the Florida Friendly Yards program contact the Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or visit <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>