



# Harvest the rain

**A simple collection system helps the garden thrive in dry times**

BY SHARON COHOON  
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES MANN

**Camilla Crandall's** Santa Fe front yard welcomes visitors to her home and the Maricam Recording Studio. In fall, her garden positively glows, thanks in part to the colorful perennials chosen by landscape architect Melissa McDonald: *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy', purple coneflower, and Russian sage. "These plants aren't just surviving, they're thriving, thanks to rainwater collected in pumice "wicks" that McDonald built into the garden. The wicks are simply trenches lined with absorbent pumice, then covered with weed barrier and topped with soil. Rain runoff from the roof of the house is channeled into a French drain (essentially a gravel-filled hole). From there, drainage pipes direct it to wicks. "Plants growing on either side of the trenches can suckle the collected rainwater for weeks," McDonald explains. (For a detailed description and a diagram, see her firm's website, below.)

Because of this extra nurturing, Crandall's coneflowers and sedum bloom long and generously. But she loves the next stage too: "I leave the brown seed heads through the winter," she says. "They attract birds and look beautiful against the snow."

**DESIGN:** Melissa McDonald, Santa Fe Permaculture, Santa Fe ([www.sfpermaculture.com](http://www.sfpermaculture.com) or 505/424-4444) ●

**Coppery pink *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy' pairs well with purple coneflower and lavender-blue Russian sage.**