

Permaculture in Practice

A revolution by any other name...

Friends, Realtors, New Mexicans, lend me your brains! I write beseeching guidance. Titles that authors use live after them; their good is oft inferred in their tone. So it is with "Roof-Reliant Landscaping," the working title for the ambitious manual about water harvesting that I am under contract to write for the Office of the State Engineer. Unfortunately, these wayward words, this tiny, titular tongue-twister, lacks both catchiness and gravitas. So, to any budding Shakespeares out there, if you have a better name for what I am about to illustrate, please call or e-mail me — soon.

Don't get me wrong. I love the concept of roof-reliant landscaping. Such landscapes rely on the precipitation that would normally run off your roof; the resource is then conveyed to a cistern that pumps the stored water through a drip-irrigation system to nourish plants.

Roof-reliant landscapes are beautiful places that use appropriate plantings. They start out looking like a typical

xeriscape but evolve into something even more beautiful and rewarding. A well-designed, roof-reliant landscape will provide more shade, wind protection, beauty, and enjoyment than even a typical traditional, water-consuming landscape.

Since roof-reliant landscapes can establish themselves without water from an aquifer or a surface-water source, they are the most ethical of landscapes. Not only do they leave alone our limited water resources, but they also improve our local ecology by controlling erosion, building soil, and encouraging wildlife.

Roof-reliant landscaping uses drought-tolerant plants that can establish themselves in three to five years. Once established, the plant material in a roof-reliant landscape will usually bounce back after a drought. During wet times, plant material may be added to a roof-reliant landscape according to a landscape plan that follows a strict water budget and a flexible but well-considered installation schedule.

It is helpful to think of the cistern as the heart of the roof-reliant landscape, and the cistern system as a kind of circulatory system. Taking this analogy further (perhaps too far), we find that there are countless species under the genus *cistern system*.

The species are determined depending on flat roof or pitched roof, first flush device or sediment trap, aboveground cistern or underground cistern, sump pump or pump house, automatic drip irrigation or manual, hose watering. In turn, species variety is determined by an even longer list of bells and whistles that make every cistern system design a site-specific, client- or homeowner-driven project.

Perhaps someday a simpler-sounding term for "roof-reliance" will catch on throughout this growing sector of the home and garden industry. Fortunately, until that time, this notion serves our purposes well because it emphasizes the essential, yet unfamiliar, idea that



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your roof is a potential water supply. Still, please do not hesitate to suggest an alternative. This revolutionary new approach to landscaping is too important to bear such a lame name.

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