

A watershed of info in new book

During a drought like this, what we need is a rainwater-harvesting book that features some guiding principles to welcome rain into our lives and landscapes. Fortunately, such a book was published last year. It's called *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands, Volume 1*, and its subtitle is "Guiding Principles to Welcome Rain into Your Life and Landscape."

Author Brad Lancaster, a permaculture designer from Tucson, Ariz., will be speaking at Plants of the Southwest (3095 Agua Fria), at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 17. Lancaster will be happy to answer your questions about water harvesting, and to sign this wonderfully detailed book.

This is the first in a three-volume set, the second two scheduled to be published later this year and in 2007. Originally intended as a single volume, the first draft was, according to the author's introduction, "too intimidating in size to the uninitiated and too large to easily carry while observing

a site, brainstorming design ideas, or implementing the plan." The result, he says, will be "three user-friendly, more portable volumes."

As one flips through the current volume one realizes Lancaster made a good decision to brake up his tome. Although the focus of the book is on water harvesting in arid lands, what you are reading is a treatise on desert survival — without any of the unsustainable groundwater-mining to which our society has become addicted.

Chapter 1 starts with an inspiring vignette called "The Man Who Farms Water." It tells the story of Zephaniah Phiri Maseko, who, over a 30-year period, raised a family of 10 on a 7.4-acre piece of land in a region that often gets less than 12 inches of rain per year. With no money for a well, Mr. Phiri installed check dams, swales, two cisterns, and other structures that slowed the flow of runoff water through his land. Over time, this resource

(which would otherwise have created, primarily, soil erosion) established orchards, vegetable crops, sugar cane, a dense banana grove, and enough drinking water to sustain chickens, turkeys, cattle, goats, and his family. The chapter ends with an in depth look at Lancaster's eight principles and three ethics of water harvesting.

In subsequent chapters, he applies these principles and ethics to topics ranging from how to estimate your property's water needs to how to develop an integrated, water-conscious design for your property. Lancaster concludes each chapter with a "real-life" example that puts these principles and ethics to work.

I have researched a significant number of texts on water harvesting; be assured that there are few books that provide such essential information in such a readable and well-illustrated format. In fact, as water resources become increasingly scarce, *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands*



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may prove to be one of the seminal books of our time. See www.harvestingrainwater.com.

Nate Downey (424-4444, www.santafepermaculture.com) is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, a locally owned landscape-design firm. His first book, *Harvest the Rain*, will be published this year by Sunstone Press. His second book will be a water harvesting "how-to" published by the State of New Mexico.