



Ready to clean up in rainwater systems?



Advising on replacement spouting / guttering and downpipes may be an autumn bread and butter sell. But how about simple rainwater harvesting systems as a value add? **Steve Bohling** reports.

AUTUMN, APRIL AND EASTER in particular mark a watershed (forgive the pun) for the Kiwi DIY customer. It's a time to clean down the outside of the house. Time to prepare for the onslaught of winter and make sure that the home – one's biggest investment – is water-tight and that the water that does run off the roof doesn't get where it shouldn't and interrupt those long, dark cosy evenings ahead.

So about now consumers will typically be planning on cleaning and replenishing their spouting and guttering, replacing broken sections and generally trying to make sure rainwater stays put.

Spouting for our hardware retail readers won't generally include metal guttering so that means Marley for a full range of roof related PVC spouting and guttering systems and components. Because most demand at this time of the year will be coming from DIY customers, the retailer will need to match the customer's guttering profile to the one already on the house in question. This could lead to redundant stock or a lost customer – but, over the last year Marley has been putting a programme called Flexipac in place.

"Retailers can order anything they want," says **Sean Waddell** of Marley. "If the customer isn't quite sure what they want or what is available, the Flexipac customised ordering service programme opens up our range to them – retailers may only stock the top selling two styles out of the six in our range but they can order from the other four styles, not to mention any of the accessorising products we make, any time they want."

Many customers just want to replace a short section of spouting and this also means knowing exactly what profile they have already. Marley's catalogue and a comprehensive programme of merchandising – including bin boxes in-store which are numbered and colour coded – have all been designed to help retailers advise and customers choose the right profile.

Did you also know that Marley's PVC is paintable? It does come in white as standard right now but it isn't a major job to paint so customers can match the colour of their spouting and downpipes to their roof.

NOTHING BEATS A CLEAN AND FLUSH

Cleaning and flushing a rainwater system is a fundamental but autumn is also about advising customers about the most effective ways of keeping debris out of the gutter.

You will need to be a quick reader to keep up with the latest set of new products including rainheads, leaf and water diverters and other easily inserted components... There are many good ways to assist in cleaning and avoiding overflows at dead of night, but "nothing beats having hands-on experience with them," as one industry pundit told us...

These rainwater components are fairly constant sellers. But, just a few months later, especially if your customer lives among pines or other small leaved trees, there will be debris in the gutters. Keeping stuff out of the gutter is as much of a job as keeping the water in...

Murray Brown of Browns Brushware has been in the gutter control market for some 10 years now via applicators in long lengths but has only recently entered the DIY retail market with the Gutter Whiskers

SAVING WATER = SAVING DOLLARS

Water does cost money. Not much but it all adds up. Local councils currently charge between \$1.475 and \$1.95 per 1000 litres of mains water. Here are a few facts that might impress your customers:

- Running a constant hose to wash your car can use up to 400 litres of clean drinking water – that's costing your customer \$0.59–0.78 every wash, depending on where they live. Washing their car twice a week could cost \$60–80 a year.
- Movable sprinklers use lots of water – up to 1300 litres (\$1.91–2.53) every hour. Using a sprinkler for an hour a day every other day costs your customers \$350–460 a year.
- Filling a watering can from a rainwater tank saves money: a running hose uses between 900–2000 litres (costing \$1.75–3.90) every hour!

product in shorter lengths. With strong POS appeal from its packaging, this product sits in the midrange market of the brush type gutter control products. "The uptake has been astounding and, with a bit of rain, it will get even stronger."

Hot tip: Murray Brown says retailers should advise customers to install gutter protection after they've cleaned out the guttering and downpipes but *before* they clean their soffits or their weatherboards, says Brown. That way the cleaning job doesn't need doing twice.

Laurie Dee, inventor of the Hedgehog bristle-based DIY gutter protection system some 20 years ago now, says business is fairly constant, with the inevitable autumn lift. He also says though that interest in rainwater systems is high – with the caveat that interest doesn't always translate into sales.

WHAT CAN YOU USE RAINWATER FOR?

Rainwater can supply up to 65% of your household's water. It can be used for:

- Watering the garden and lawn and washing vehicles (20% of total household water consumption – no building consent required).
- Supplying the laundry and toilet and topping up spas and swimming pools (45+% of total household water consumption – requires a building consent and a plumber).



CHOOSING THE TANK SIZE

Forget giant tanks that hold thousands of litres, you can do quite a lot with a few hundred litres of rainwater in a barrel. You can also often string several together. Tank size depends on the following factors:

- How the customer plans to use the rainwater.
- The amount of water they use.
- The roof area available to collect water from.

Average water use (litres/day)	Rain tank/ barrel capacity (litres)				
	200	1000	3000	4500	9500
Toilet (125)	50%	80%	95%	100%	100%
Toilet + Laundry (225)	40%	65%	85%	90%	100%
Toilet + Laundry + Garden (325)	35%	50%	70%	80%	90%
Av annual % of water supplied (150m ² roof)					

These figures show that a 200L tank supplied by rainwater from a 150m² roof could supply more than half of gardening irrigation needs. (Source: Waitakere City Council.)

CATCH AND (DON'T) RELEASE...

Autumn isn't just about too much water – especially if there's too little... Entry level rainwater harvesting starts with a 200 litre, food grade rainwater barrel or tank attached to a downpipe. They require no building consents or professional plumbing. And they are gathering momentum.

Why? It's a cool thing to do, it's easy to get into and sometimes it's downright useful. For example: a mid-February drought forced the Far North District Council to declare a total ban on the use of hoses in the Kaitiāia to ensure "essential household purposes" were covered.

Watering the garden and washing the car were not considered "essential purposes". Many keen Far North gardeners (and car buffs) will have no doubt disagreed and will have been praying for rain. Many may also have been looking belatedly at systems designed to catch and keep the rainwater that comes off their roofs when there is any.

Watergain, vendor of the Gutterwitch gutter control system, is into rainwater harvesting products – tanks, complete systems, diverters etc. Watergain's **Guy Richardson** talks about a significant upturn in inter-

DO YOU NEED A BUILDING CONSENT?

- A building consent is generally not required for tanks used only for garden irrigation.
- A building consent is required for any tank connected to the household plumbing.
- Any buried water tank – building consent required.

Size does matter but you don't need a building consent for the installation of water storage tanks:

- If the tank is less than 35,000 litres (7,700 gallon) and is supported directly by the ground.
- If the tank is less than 2,000 litres (440 gallon) and is supported less than 2 metres above the supporting ground.
- If the tank is less than 500 litres (110 gallon) and is supported less than 4 metres above the supporting ground.


est this year for harvesting products. The company has worked with Mitre10 on a price pointed, easy-install, entry level harvesting system with a smaller (and more affordable) 200 Litre collection tank as a way to entice Kiwi customers into taking a first step into water harvesting.

Rainwater capture systems are nowhere near as progressed here as they are in Australia, for obvious reasons. Figures suggest that 30–40% of Aussie homes have rainwater tanks connected to their toilet and / or laundry. But New Zealand's uptake of even the simplest rainwater harvesting systems is far less progressed.

Sean Waddell describes sales of Marley's water harvesting products as "in their infancy", mainly because "the consumer still doesn't quite understand the subject". Why isn't rainwater harvesting more popular? Says Waddell: "Water is cheap right now but people will eventually become more motivated when the cost gets to 15 cents a litre..." (However see our sidebar elsewhere in this article – water costs mount up, little by little...)

In the urban context truth is that there is little pressure for people to get into rainwater harvesting apart from the feelgood factor. Uptake of Waitakere City Council's rainwater tank rebate scheme (2,000-5,000 Litre rainwater tanks, requiring the tank to be plumbed into the laundry and / or toilet) appears to support this. From some 70 enquires about the rebate since 2004 only 21 were actually rebated, says Waitakere City Council's **Frances Harrison**. There is however "constant demand for information, so there's a lot of interest".

Right now, consensus is that most consumers need to be "suggested" into rainwater harvesting. Soon, though, as soon as new house builds begin to include even simple rainwater systems, it's thought that the larger scale, more sophisticated market (using rainwater in the laundry and for flushing toilets) will also start to really take off.

As we said above, there's a lot of interest but rainwater harvesting is still just on the cusp of becoming really big. 

WHAT MAKES UP A RAINWATER SYSTEM?

Roofs – Make sure the roof paint is lead-free otherwise rainwater can be collected from iron roofing, clay tiles and slates. It is important that no lead is used as roof flashing or gutter solder as the slightly acidic quality of rain can dissolve the lead and contaminate water supply.

Gutters & downpipes – Aluminium, galvanised steel or PVC are OK. Gutters and downpipes must be properly sized, sloped and installed to maximise the quantity of rainwater collected. Leaf guards stop debris entering.

First flush diverters – These direct the first runoff from a roof after rain into a separate small chamber because, this water picks up most of the dirt, debris and other contaminants. Once the chamber has filled, the rest of the water flows to the downpipe connected to the rainwater tank. The small chamber has a small tube in the base that allows it to empty before the next rain. First flush diverters are optional for non-drinking water use.

Storage tanks / barrels – Tank materials include food grade plastic, steel, concrete and fibreglass. A tight fitting top cover prevents evaporation, mosquito breeding and keeps animals, insects (and kids!) out of the tank. Tank should sit in a cool place, out of sunlight to prevent algae growing. An overflow outlet and access for cleaning is important. The tank should be placed high enough for gravity to convey the water, or be fitted with a pump.

Water treatment for non-potable (non-drinking) use – Additives for settling sediments or buffering pH and simple filters are optional for non-potable rainwater use. Fine filters and microbiological disinfection are only necessary for drinking water.