



Home Lawn and Garden

Rain Barrels

Rain barrels are a valuable addition to any garden. Site the barrels underneath a downspout to collect water from the roof each time it rains; the water can be saved and used to water plants in your yard.

Benefits to both the gardener and the environment

- **Save drinking water resources.** On average, nearly 30% of our daily water use is attributed to lawn and garden care. Collecting water from rain events decreases the amount of drinking water used to water plants and after all, clean, fresh water is a limited, precious resource!
- **Decrease water and sewer bills.** Capturing rainwater also keeps money in your pocket by reducing the amount of water needed from municipal sources.
- **Utilize higher quality water for plants.** Water collected from rain events is better for plants than treated water (which often contains chlorine).
- **Reduce nonpoint source pollution.** Nonpoint source pollution is created as rainwater passes over land surfaces and picks up contaminants enroute to our local streams and rivers (i.e. driveways and roads are coated with motor oil residue and road salt; agricultural fields often have fertilizers and pesticides applied). Since rain barrels reduce the amount of water that runs off your property, they also reduce the amount of nonpoint source pollution that can harm aquatic and human life.



Tips and precautions for rain barrel maintenance

- Remember to keep your rain barrel drained in the winter months. Freezing and thawing of water can crack the rain barrel components.

- Clean out the screen and tank periodically to remove any debris that has settled.
- Lead the overflow hose into an existing garden or plant a rain garden to receive the excess water.
- Note that the water is not drinkable. The water collected from the roof can be laden with leaf litter, bird droppings (potential for bacteria), dust, other airborne materials, and chemicals from roof material. It is best to use the water on inedible plants such as the lawn or flowers. The water can be used on vegetable plants, but to ensure safety, make sure to water near the base of the plant and avoid the fruit and foliage, especially on leafy greens.
- Specifically avoid watering edible plants if you have an old tar and gravel, old asbestos shingle roofs, treated wood shingles or shakes, copper roofs and if you have a zinc anti-moss strip. Also, pay attention to the type of gutter you have, since some may be coated with lead-based paints.
- Many residents with an asphalt shingle roof avoid watering vegetables since complex hydrocarbons may be leached from the roof; however, there is no definitive research to prove the extent of the leaching.