

Save Water with a Rain Barrel

A great way to save water—and money on your water bill—is to build or purchase a rain barrel. A rain barrel captures rainwater, which can then be used to water plants.

The great thing about rain barrels is that you *can* save some water for dry times. And because you're not getting the water from the public water system, you can use your rain barrel to water whenever you want—including when your area is under water restrictions.

Installing a spigot on a rain barrel makes it easy to fill a watering can for hand watering plants.

Your rain barrel can also be hooked up to seep irrigation systems. They can (and should) be made mosquito-proof with a tight-fitting lid and mesh screen, and can be painted or hidden by foliage or a trellis to make them more attractive. Rain barrels can capture a significant amount of water, and can have a very tangible effect on your water bill. Best of all, they're fairly easy to find in stores and to make!

It may not seem like much, but you can collect a considerable amount of water with a rain barrel. **For every inch of rain on 500 square feet of roof, you collect about 300 gallons of water.** What does this mean in reality? The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that a rain barrel will save most gardeners about 1,300 gallons of water during the hot summer months. **Watering a driveway or sidewalk wastes about 25 gallons every five minutes a hose is sprayed.**

The simplest type of rain barrel is simply a water-tight container that you place at the bottom of your gutter system. Water from your roof will flow through the gutter and into the rain barrel. Any type of water-tight container will work, but one that has a fine mesh screen over the top will keep mosquitoes from laying eggs in your garden's new water supply.



How to Use Your Rain Barrel

Always keep your rain barrel covered, to keep out mosquitoes, leaves, and other intruders. Before you install it, think about how you'll use the water in it. Will you hand water? If so, you'll just need a tap near the bottom to fill up your watering can and you may want to elevate the barrel to more easily access the spigot. If you plan to water planting beds, you may want to set up some kind of seep irrigation system that draws water from the barrel.

Monitor your rain barrel regularly for overflow. If you're away from home for an extended period of time, a heavy rain could cause overflow, which could possibly lead to damage to the foundation of your home or other problems. To avoid this, disconnect the downspout from the rain barrel and cover the screen on top of the barrel.

Rain Barrel Construction

Rain barrels are generally 50- to 80-gallon containers fitted with a fine screen to keep out leaves, insects, and other potential contaminants and a tap or small pump for distributing the water. They're generally attached to a downspout to capture rainwater that lands on the roof, and can range from fairly simple and cheap to pretty complex and expensive. There's a lot of information online about building a rain barrel system for your home.

You can purchase a rain barrel from many garden centers and large home improvement centers. If you can find the container, you can modify it yourself. Use only a food-grade drum used to carry juice, olives, pickles, etc.—be sure that has never been used to store chemicals. Or you can contact <http://cals.arizona.edu/pinal/> to find out more. Many county Extension offices offer free workshops about using rain barrels, offering the containers to participants for free or a small fee.

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Source: <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/yard/tools/save-water-with-a-rain-barrel/>