



Rain Barrels

Rain barrels collect rainwater that lands on your roof. By collecting and storing rainwater, you can reduce runoff that causes pollution, flooding, and stream-bank erosion. You can also save on your water bill and conserve drinking water.

Rain barrels come in a variety of sizes, from 30 gallons to 100 gallons. Rain barrels can be added to any building that has gutters and downspouts. Each barrel has an outlet that can be connected to a garden hose to allow you to water your lawn and gardens. Rain barrels also can have an overflow outlet that can be directed to a native plant garden or rain garden on your property or into a grassy area away from the house foundation.

To install your own rain barrel, follow the same steps you would for any home project: Make a plan, buy and install the rain barrel, and maintain the rain barrel.

1) Make a Plan

Start with a list of yard conditions and considerations:

- Could you install a rain barrel to water a garden you already have in place? Could you use one with a new native plant garden?
- Where do your downspouts direct water on the property? If your downspouts direct runoff to grassy or landscaped areas on the property, you may not need a rain barrel. If downspouts direct roof runoff to a hard surface like a driveway, you may want to direct that rain into a rain barrel instead.
- Where can you direct the water *from* the rain barrel? A rain barrel releases water in two ways: From a drip house and an overflow hose. Consider how you can direct water from both outlets.
- How many rain barrels do you need? Estimate the size of the roof area that contributes water to each downspout to determine the number of gallons of water that will be captured in a typical rainstorm.
- What style of rain barrel do you prefer? A simply functional one that complements the landscape or a decorative barrel that serves as a showpiece in your yard? Search the Internet for photos of rain barrels to get an idea of the types of designs you prefer.

2) Buy and Install a Rain Barrel

Rain barrels are common enough now that most hardware stores carry them. Check with retailers in your area.

Costs vary, depending on which model you choose. Some rain barrels include planters or are made to look like pottery. Whatever the “look,” most rain barrels are made from plastic to prevent rust and rot.

Older models require redirecting gutter downspouts to drain water into the top of the barrel. Newer systems allow you to connect a hose to the downspout by drilling a small hole and inserting a diverter into the spout. These newer options lessen the dread many people have of cutting into a downspout.

Make Your Own Rain Barrel: With a recycled food-grade plastic container and a few hoses, you can build your own rain barrel for a fraction of the cost to buy one. For assistance, check with city/county government agencies to see if they offer rain barrel workshops. Many Izaak Walton League chapters offer these workshops as well.

3) Maintain the Rain Barrel

Rain barrels require a small amount of basic maintenance. If you are not holding the water to use for plants, empty the barrel between rain storms. Keep home gutters clean to ensure water is flowing down into the rain barrel rather than over the edge of a clogged gutter. Periodically remove leaves or other debris from the screen at the top of the rain barrel. Make sure the filter screen is intact to keep out mosquitos. Disconnect and empty the rain barrel for storage during the winter.