

Rain Barrels: A Way of Collecting & Using Rainwater

Have you ever watched a river of rainwater run down your driveway into the lake or storm sewer? Or even worse, seep into your basement? Collecting roof runoff in rain barrels is a good solution to these problems and it also helps alleviate stressed water systems and conserve limited resources. Although rain barrels have been around for thousands of years, people are now encouraged more than ever to use them as a way to protect our lakes and rivers while saving money on water bills.

WHAT IS A RAIN BARREL?

A rain barrel is any type of container used to catch water flowing from a downspout. Rain barrels reduce the amount of stormwater runoff by collecting roof runoff and storing the rainwater for future use.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The rain barrel is placed underneath a shortened downspout, diverting the roof runoff into the rain barrel. Placing the rain barrel on a **STURDY** platform will allow for more clearance under the spigot, and it will also increase the rate of flow if you are attaching a hose to the barrel's spigot.

HOW DO I MAINTAIN THE RAIN BARREL?

During the rainy months, routinely inspect your rain barrel. Remove any debris that has accumulated on the lid that might block the screen mesh. You should also routinely clean the inside of your rain barrel. During the winter months, remember to take your barrel out of operation. Turn it upside down or store it inside and redirect the downspout away from the foundation.



BENEFITS OF USING A RAIN BARREL

- They provide an alternative to tap water for watering lawns and flower gardens.
- They will help reduce peak volume and velocity of stormwater runoff reaching lakes and rivers.
- They will help reduce peak water demands during the summer months.

RESTRICTIONS ON RAIN BARREL USE

- Water collected from rain barrels is not suitable for human or pet consumption.
- Due to lack of research data, water collected in a rain barrel is *not* recommended for watering fruit or vegetable gardens.
- The water flow (and pressure) will be less than from your outdoor spigot, making sprinklers ineffective. Plan to use soaker hoses, hand-held spray nozzles and/or watering cans. Elevating your rain barrel on a sturdy platform will increase the flow.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT RAIN BARRELS

- Rainwater can actually help improve the health of your gardens, lawn and trees. Rainwater is naturally “soft” and devoid of minerals, chlorine and other chemicals found in city water.
- During a one-inch rain event 0.6 gallons of water will fall on a square foot of roof and 54 gallons will fall on 90 square feet of roof—enough to fill a 55 gallon rain barrel. To collect twice this volume from the same downspout, connect the overflow hose from the first rain barrel to a second rain barrel.
- A plastic rain barrel may be painted any color you wish. Use spray paint specially formulated to bond well to plastic surfaces.
- Rain barrels can be purchased at a cost between \$70-\$300. Or, you can reduce your costs considerably by making your own.

Start a new trend—by placing rain barrels around your house, you will be teaching and encouraging others in your neighborhood to do the same!

FEATURES TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING OR MAKING A RAIN BARREL

Removable lid or opening—for cleaning inside the barrel

Filter—to keep out debris and mosquitoes

1.5 inch diameter overflow—attach sump-pump hose and direct to a second rain barrel or to an appropriate site away from the foundation (*Note: 3/4-inch garden hose overflow is often used, but will not accommodate heavy rain events.*)



Optional spigot—for filling watering cans

Spigot—for garden hose attachment

Rain barrel suppliers in Minnesota

Sustainable Community Solutions Northfield
(507) 664-2023 www.renewnorthfield.org
53-gallon, white oak barrels \$159.00

Gerten's Inver Grove Heights
(651) 450-1501 www.gertens.com
65- & 75-gallon, plastic barrels \$179.99

Verde Strategies Minneapolis
(952) 212-6576 www.verdestrategies.com
55-gallon, blue, plastic barrels \$50.00

Northland Arboretum Brainerd
(218) 829-8770
55-gallon, terra cotta, plastic barrels \$88.80

Eco Duluth
(218) 626-1118
55-gallon, blue & black, plastic barrels \$85.00

Mills Fleet Farm Stores various locations
65-gallon, green & gray, plastic barrels \$139.95

Other sources of rain barrels

- www.rainbarrelsandmore.com
- www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com
- www.rainwatersolutions.com/rainbarrels.html

Barrel suppliers in Minnesota (for making your own rain barrels)

Western Container New Hope
(612) 338-2413 www.bargaincontainer.com
55-gallon, closed-top, blue, plastic barrels for \$16.00. Pick up only.

Consolidated Container Co. Minneapolis
(612) 781-0923 www.containerexperts.com
55-gallon, blue plastic containers for \$65.14

Rain barrel construction

- <http://home.comcast.net/~leavesdance/rainbarrels/construction.html>
- www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Content/DEP/Rainscapes/pdf/barrel.pdf
- www.rwmwd.org/ (under "Publications")