

Rain Barrels in the Landscape  
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Once a standard fixture at the side of homes, the long-vanished rain barrel is making a comeback due to prolonged droughts. By using rain barrels, you are benefiting the environment by reducing storm sewer runoff, helping your garden and landscape thrive, reducing your water bill, and reducing stress on our water supply. In nature, rain is welcomed by plants and animals and sustains the natural balance of life. Rain is absorbed by the roots of trees, grasses, and other plants. Remaining water runs purely into streams, rivers, and wetlands.

In urban environments, the story of rain is a little different. Much of the rain in urban areas hits rooftops, roads, or sidewalks and rushes into the storm sewers, carrying anything it picked up along the way. That might include trash, oil, dirt, and other contaminants. An important step in preserving water quality is to reduce the amount of water running off into storm sewers. Lawns, trees, shrubs, and other plants naturally reduce water runoff by absorbing it for growth. Manually collecting rainwater runoff with a container is another method of reducing runoff. This is not a new concept, as people have collected rainwater in containers since ancient times. Rain barrels are becoming more popular with homeowners, especially after the water restrictions. Rain barrels are barrels that collect water from downspouts on homes. They range in many different sizes, shapes, and designs.

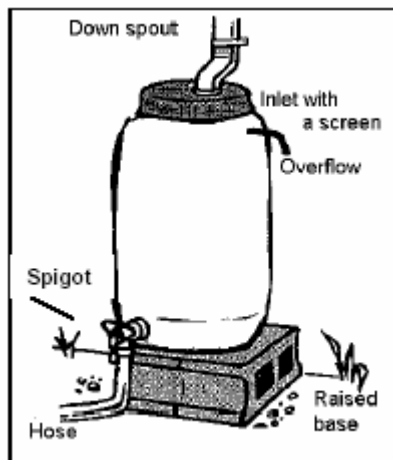
Rain water is a great source of water from home gardens. It is free, you can use it whenever you want, and it is actually higher quality water than city water. It does not contain the chlorine and fluoride that is in city water. Fluoride and chlorine are not desired by plants. Another benefit of collecting rainwater in barrels is that it diverts water that otherwise would collect around the foundation of your home. **Water from rain barrels should not be used for drinking and some question whether the water running off rooftops should be used on edible crops like fruits or vegetables.**

Maintenance is very low for rain barrels, but there are a few things to keep in mind. Mosquitoes breed in standing water so it is important to prevent mosquito breeding in your rain barrel. Cover the rain barrel with a very fine screen and empty the barrel at a minimum of 10-day intervals to prevent mosquito

breeding. It is also important to keep the barrel covered to prevent children or animals from accidentally falling in. Many rain barrels come equipped with screens and devices to prevent children and animals from falling in.

### Tips for Using a Rain Barrel at Home:

Put concrete or cinder blocks on level ground under the downspout to provide a base under the rain barrel. Make sure the barrel is level, not leaning and ready to tip over! 50 gallons of water weighs about



400 pounds!! The higher you can place your barrel, the more water pressure you can get from a hose.

Shorten your downspout using a hacksaw or tin snips. Attach a downspout extender (4" diameter flexible pipe that is square on one end and round on the other end) available at most hardware or home improvement stores. One end of this pipe is attached to the downspout and the other is inserted into a 4" hole that has been cut into the top of the barrel.

During heavy rain (>1"), run garden hoses away from your house into your yard/garden and open spigot valves to drain away from your house. Your rain barrel will overflow during a heavy rain event, so try to prevent it from overflowing near your foundation! A 1" rain falling on a 1000 square foot roof can yield over 600 gallons of water so plan for surplus. Install an overflow pipe near the top of your barrel to pipe water away from your foundation and leave the spigot open to run water out of the barrel during rainy periods.

Periodically check your barrel to ensure that it remains in good working order. To prevent algae growth, do not let water remain in your barrel more than 5-7 days.

The Keeping Barrow Beautiful Office is offering Rain Barrels that have been constructed by the Barrow County Master Gardeners. Call Shannon Young at Keeping Barrow Beautiful (770 307-3020) or Britt West at the Barrow County Extension Office (770 307-3029) for more information or to purchase your own Rain Barrel.