



Rain Barrels



What is a rain barrel?

A rain barrel is a system that collects and stores rainwater from your roof that would otherwise run off and be diverted to storm drains, streams, and rivers. It is composed of a 55 gallon drum (plastic or wooden), a vinyl hose, PVC couplings, a screen grate to keep debris and insects out, and other common items. A rain barrel is relatively simple and inexpensive to construct and can sit conveniently under a residential gutter downspout.

What are the advantages of a rain barrel?

Lawn and garden watering make up nearly 40% of total household water use during the summer. A rain barrel collects water and stores it for when you need it most, during periods of drought, to water plants, wash your car, or top a swimming pool. It provides an ample supply of free "soft water" to homeowners, containing no chlorine, lime or calcium. This makes it ideal for gardens, flower pots, and car and window washing.

A rain barrel will save most homeowners about 1,300 gallons of water during peak summer months. Saving water not only helps protect the environment, it saves you money and energy (decreased demand for treated tap water). Diverting water from storm drains also decreases the impact of runoff to streams and rivers. Therefore, a rain barrel is an easy way for you to help protect our watersheds and have a consistent supply of clean, fresh water for outdoor use, for FREE!

Benefits:

- Reduces runoff volumes
- Conserves water for reuse
- Provides irrigation water during watering restrictions
- Saves money and energy
- Protects watersheds
- It's clean and fresh



Rain barrels are a great medium for artwork! Add some flair to your yard by painting your rain barrel!



Cisterns

Cisterns can be constructed of nearly any impervious, water retaining material and are distinguishable from rain barrels only by their larger sizes and different shapes. They can be located either above or below ground, and in "out-of-the-way" places that can easily be incorporated into a site design. Commercially available systems are typically constructed of high density plastics. Cisterns can either be constructed on-site or pre-manufactured and then placed on-site.

Rain barrels can be purchased from the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District when supplies are available. The SWCD also offers rain barrel workshops where you can build your own rain barrel. Check our website and Facebook to learn about upcoming workshops!

Rain barrels are simple to construct from everyday materials. Visit our website to learn how you can make your own rain barrel.

Rain barrel installation and maintenance

Placement:

- Choose a downspout on your house or garage that is close to the plants and garden you water most.
- Place your rain barrel on a pervious surface that allows overflow from your barrel to soak into the ground. Be sure that your rain barrel overflow does not go onto your neighbors property or pool water near your homes foundation.

Installation:

There are multiple ways to install rain barrels. Below are two common options. Whichever option you choose, elevating your barrel off the ground will be necessary to create water pressure and allow you to place a bucket or watering can under the spigot. Stands can be built or purchased and concrete blocks work nicely. Always be sure your barrel is stable and consider safety measure such as attaching it to your home via straps or another mechanism. Always keep your rain barrel lid on and secure to prevent mosquito larvae from breeding and to prevent drowning hazards.

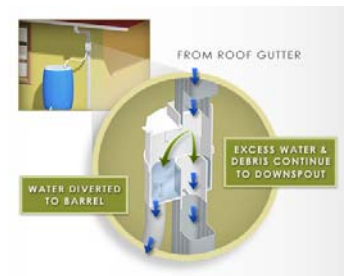
Option 1:

1. Place your barrel near the downspout you have selected, and plan out how you will direct the downspout.
2. Disconnect your downspout from the line leading to the storm drain or curb drain by sawing the downspout above where the top of the rain barrel will be, leaving room for the elbow to be attached.
3. Attach a downspout elbow or extender to the end of your downspout so that water from your downspout is directed into the rain barrel through the screen vent on top.
4. If you have an aluminum downspout, secure it to the elbow with screws.
5. Place your rain barrel under the downspout elbow.
6. Optional: Create an overflow hole on the top-side of the barrel and attach tubing to direct overflow. Make sure that the overflow is directed into your own yard. Note: Retain the cut off portion of your downspout to re-attach in winter when your barrel is removed (see maintenance instructions).



Option 2:

Downspout diverters can be purchased at many home improvement stores and online. These diverters install directly into your downspout and allow a portion of the rain water traveling down your downspout to be redirected into your barrel. When the barrel is full, the rain water continues down the downspout. This method eliminates the need for overflow hoses and leaves your downspout intact.



Maintenance:

Periodically check the screen and remove large debris by hand. If necessary, remove lid and spray screen and lid with hose to clean.

Algae is not usually a problem as the runoff from your roof should be low in nutrients. If algae growth becomes a problem with your barrel, empty the barrel and wash it with a dilute bleach solution of 3/4 cup of bleach per gallon of water. Rinse the barrel well after bleaching.

Barrels will crack due to freezing and thawing if left outside in the winter. Remove your barrel before it freezes in winter and store it upside down (indoors if possible). If you installed your barrel with Option 1, reattach the piece of downspout you cut during installation.

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Contact the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District for more information:

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