

Rain Barrels

Rainwater Harvesting: What Is It?, tips, and more!



What Are Rain Barrels?

Rain barrels are containers that are placed at the end of downspouts to capture and store roof runoff. The water that is collected can be used for irrigation of the landscaping and gardens. Rain barrels are not just for storing water, they must be maintained because they could possibly become a breeding ground for mosquitos. They could also cause property damage by flooding.

This is a Guide to Help You:

Benefits of Having a Rain Barrel

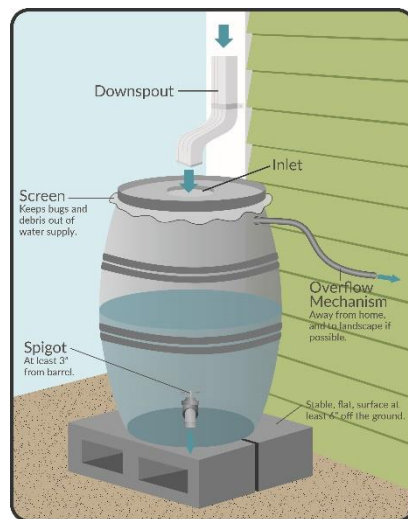
Rain barrels can help slow down runoff, reduce your water bill, and improve drainage problems. They can be fairly easy to find, inexpensive, and there are kits to adapt an existing barrel to use for rainwater harvesting. Rain barrels can also have a lifespan of up to 20 years if properly maintained.

Installation

Locate the rain barrel on a flat surface next to or near a downspout. If you live in a subdivision, check the association covenants for any restrictions on where you can place the rain barrel. The rain barrel may be placed on a small platform to improve flow from the spigot, but keep in mind that a rain barrel can weigh up to 500 pounds when filled. If you plan to place the rain barrel on a platform, it should be flat, sturdy, and strong enough to support the barrel when it is full.

Some plastic rain barrels might have a color you don't like. If you decide to paint the rain barrel, the best paint would be Krylon Fusion because it is made specially for plastic. When choosing a color, be mindful of your neighbors and your association covenants. Another way to obscure the rain barrel would be to place plantings around it.

The barrel must have an overflow or a way to stop more water from going into the barrel when it is full. Any overflow from the barrel should be directed away from the house (at least 6-feet away to prevent basement and crawlspace flooding). The



goal is to prevent pooling of water around the base of the rain barrel. If you have a rain garden, this is a good place to divert the excess water.

- Property lines: overflow should not be directed onto a neighboring property line and should be within 1-foot of your property line.
- Access: avoid routing the overflow across a walkway, patio or driveway (this can create an ice hazard in the winter).
- Slope: You may need to add or remove soil to make sure that the slope of the ground allows water to flow away from the barrel
- Other concerns: do not direct water to the area over a septic drain field or underground oil tank unless they have been decommissioned. Do not discharge overflow within ten feet of a retaining wall.

Maintenance

Inspect your rain barrel periodically for leaks (especially at the spigot and all the connection points). Make sure that leaves and other debris from the roof do not clog the system. Screen all vents and other spaces in the barrel to prevent mosquitos from entering the barrel and breeding.

- Make sure to keep the spigot closed when you are not using the water so that the barrel will collect water.
- Regularly check your gutters, downspouts, rain barrel intake and spigot to be sure they have not become clogged. Keeping your gutters clean will keep the "gunk" from building up in the bottom of the rain barrels.
- Empty the barrel at least weekly and between rain events in the wet season.
- Clean the inside of the barrel annually by emptying it, opening it and brushing the inside or washing it with mild disinfectants such as vinegar or another non-toxic cleaner. The washout can be disposed of in a sanitary sewer or to a vegetated area if the disinfecting agent is dilute enough to not harm the plants.
- If your rain barrel is plastic, it will need to be protected in the winter to prevent it from freezing. To do this, disconnect it, empty it and store it indoors. If the barrel has to be left outside, then store it upside down.
- When the rain barrel is disconnected for winter storage, it is important to note that the rain and snowmelt will come directly out of the downspout onto the ground. To prevent water from being too close to the foundation, add a downspout extender to the end of the downspout.



Hazards and Safety Concerns



Installation Hazards: rain barrels are for outdoor use rainwater collection only. They are not recommended for any other uses. Downspout edges may be sharp, do it is important to wear protective gloves when cutting the downspouts and connecting them to the rain barrel. Always wear safety glasses when cutting or drilling to prevent eye injuries. Protect your home's siding with a sheet of plywood inserted between the downspout and the siding to prevent damage.

Electrical Hazard: if downspouts contain or are connected to heating cables or electrical wires, there is a potential electrocution or fire hazard during installation. It is important to make sure that any electrical cables are removed or moved out of the way before cutting.

Tipping Hazard: accidental tipping can occur if the rain barrel is not set up properly. This could cause personal injury or property damage. Do not place the barrel on a surface that is not flat and even. Always use a solid surface underneath the rain barrel.

Drowning Hazard: Children should never be allowed to play on or near the rain barrel. Children should never climb on or open the rain barrel. The following step should be taken to avoid accidental drowning

- If there is a lid, keep it securely attached and closed.
- If the barrel cover is cracked, warped, or broken/damaged, empty the rain barrel and do not use it until the cover can be replaced and the barrel can be securely closed.
- Do not place the rain barrel near a deck, stairs or other items that would allow a child to climb onto or into the barrel

Water Contamination Hazard: the water collected in your rain barrel comes off the roof, into the gutters and downspouts. It is NOT considered "drinkable" or potable water. There could be bacteria and other disease-causing organism from birds and other animals that could have been on your roof. Drinking water from a rain barrel may cause serious illness.

- DO NOT let people or animals drink water from a rain barrel
- Use rain barrel water only for watering outdoor landscape, lawns, or flowers
- It is suggested to only use the water for drip or trickle irrigation and not for overhead watering. This will prevent contamination of edible, above-ground plant parts (especially leafy greens). More information can be found at https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/static/publication/js/pdf_js/web/viewer.html?slug=water-quality-of-rooftop-runoff
- DO NOT use water from the barrel for cooking, washing or in any way that could result in someone swallowing the water.
- Empty and clean the rain barrel regularly so the water inside does not become stagnant

Avoiding Mosquitos

Mosquitos thrive in water that has been standing for a period of time. Mosquitos can also penetrate the smallest holes, so it is important to keep all openings of the rain barrel are screened or sealed somehow. It is important to prevent mosquito breeding because this can become a Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health issue and could result in an investigator ordering you to clean up or potentially remove the rain barrel.

- Keep the inside of the barrel clean and free of organic matter
- Keep the rain barrel lid sealed
- During the rainy season, water may pool on the top of the rain barrel. Use your hand to splash the water off the top of the rain barrel or a towel to clear the rain barrel of pooling water every 3-4 days
- If you find mosquitoes in or around your rain barrel (more than normal for that time of the year), empty the rain barrel completely and allow to dry. This should kill any mosquito larvae.
- Chemical larvicides can be added to your rain barrel to kill and prevent mosquito eggs and larvae. Mosquito Dunks are often used in rain barrels and are available at hardware and garden stores. If you want to use the rain barrel water for vegetable gardens or fruit trees, this might not be the method for you.



For More Information on how you can help storm water quality please visit:

utilities.cityoffortwayne.org/ways-you-can-help

For Storm related issues, please contact:

311 or (260) 427-8311

With proper installation, maintenance, and use, a rain barrel should function properly. The City of Fort Wayne and City Utilities assume no liability for the installation, maintenance or use of your rain barrel. We are not responsible for any rain barrel misuse, malfunction, property damage, injury or illness associated with your rain barrel, its accessories, or its contents.

