

## Installing and Using your Rain Barrel

Rain Barrels are designed to collect and store roof water run off. And you will be surprised by how much run off you will have. Each 100 square feet of roof will collect 62 gallons of water during a one-inch rainfall. So 1000 square feet will collect 620 gallons of water! Thus, it is important to figure in your placement plans that your 55 gallon rain barrel will fill up fairly quickly.

Your rain barrel can be used just as it is. Or, if you wish, the plastic barrels can be painted using a good quality all-surface spray paint. Ours took about one full can and about 5 minutes to paint. So you can match your house color, or do like some creative people do and apply a base coat of white and then hand decorate.

Site your barrel near your expected use area. Since the water will flow by gravity, you will want it close to your garden or planter. Also, don't place in a spot that gets full sunlight. It may lead to algae growth.

You will need to have clean gutters and downspouts. You don't want leaves and silt flowing into the barrel. The rain barrel is equipped with a top screen to keep out debris, but the cleaner the water is going in, the better for your barrel. And if you don't have a gutter system, some people buy a short 10 foot length of gutter and attach it to a porch or deck roof just to collect rainwater.

Once you decide where to place it, you will need to raise it off the ground a bit. Use two cinder blocks or a wooden platform to elevate the barrel. We have seen that some folks build a high platform to gain water pressure, just like the big water tanks you see in cities. The higher it is, the better the flow of water.

You will need to divert water into the tank from the downspout. At the natural Resources Building, we wanted to save our



downspouts for winter, so we unscrewed what was there and replaced it with a flexible downspout we purchased from the local home store. There are also commercially made diversion spouts that can be fitted into your gutter system. These switch flow from barrel to spout with a flick of a lever. One even uses back-pressure to sense when the barrel is full and then sends the run-off down the down spout.

Rain barrels, as is any open pool of water, could be a good breeding places for mosquitoes. So leave the top screen intact and direct the water flow though it. In addition to the leaves and twigs, it will also keep out the bugs. If you do get mosquitoes, drain the barrel and allow to dry out.

Our barrels are made with food grade plastic, so you can use the water on your vegetable garden. However, you may wish to let the first heavy rains of the year clean your roof before you begin to collect and use the run-off. And don't drink the water!

You should plan on draining and storing the barrel during the winter. Water left inside will freeze and crack the barrel, so drain it out. Replace your downspout so the early rains are directed away from your house.

Rain barrels can be linked together so that the overflow from one goes into another (and another). This way you can collect hundreds of gallons of water.

There are many, many useful rain barrel construction and use tips, brochures, and videos on the internet. Collecting rain water in barrels, tanks and cisterns is something man has been doing since he had a roof over his head. The nice thing is that once your system is in place, the water is free and you are helping to reduce storm water runoff. Happy Rain-Barreling!

