

Rain Gain: Why A Rain Water Barrel Is Worth It – And How To Use One Properly

Consider how bountiful Mother Nature is in the agua department. Per the U.S. Geological Survey, if your property spans a half-acre lot and it gets pelted by a storm that drops one inch of rain, your yard is the recipient of over 13,500 gallons of water; if there was a way to collect it all, you could use it to take a bath every day for nearly a year.

Not that you'd want to bathe in rainwater. But some of that stored H₂O could be helpful for irrigating your lawn and garden, washing your car and other tasks. And that's where a rain barrel can come in handy. A rain barrel is a store-bought or self-made large container that, with the aid of your gutters and a downspout, stores water that runs off your roof. This collection system can help decrease your reliance on tap water for outdoor chores, and that's good for the environment and your wallet, say the experts.

"A rain Water barrel can save money on your water bill, limit storm water runoff and erosion, reduce water usage, and even decrease the associated at-scale management costs, such as the cost of chemicals used at your local water treatment facility," said Jenny Isler, director of sustainability at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. And it's particularly useful during drought conditions, too, she adds.

Using multiple rain barrels may even "reduce your outdoor water usage by as much as 40 percent," said Nicki Cornacchione, merchandise director with Improvements, a home solutions online retailer based in Cleveland. "It's an efficient way to collect mineral-free soft water to use around your yard or garden."

Melissa Rappaport Schiffman, a Minneapolis-based sustainability expert with Rise, an online home improvement guide, said a one-inch rainfall produces approximately 0.62 gallons of water per square foot of roof.

"Storm water runoff can be a big problem in cities that experience large storms, so rain barrels help alleviate the problem," Schiffman said.

Commercially made rain barrels are available at many home improvement stores, typically in 50- to 100-gallon sizes and made from sturdy plastic.

“The size of the barrel you should use will depend on what you want to use the water for and the volume needed. Give careful consideration to the annual precipitation in your area and the size of the roof area from which the barrel is collecting,” Isler said.

Cornacchione recommends choosing one with a diverter at the bottom (to prevent a messy overflow) and a built-in spigot or valve that you can connect a hose to. If yours lacks a spigot, you can use a portable electric sump pump and attach a hose to an adapter on the pump to create a low-pressure water stream.

“You can also save money by making your own rain barrel from a container like a standard 33-gallon garbage can,” said Pablo Solomon, a green designer based in Lampasas, Texas.

Once you acquire one, select your rain barrel spot carefully.

“You want to pick a location near a downspout where possible overflow from the barrel will not cause any problems to walls or foundations,” Solomon said.

Additionally, “be sure the area is flat and level. You don’t want the barrel to tip over once it begins to fill up due to a non-level surface,” Cornacchione said.

Note that, if you want gravity-fed water pressure through your connected hose, you’ll want to elevate the Water barrel somewhat. Isler suggests safely resting the container atop concrete blocks.

Next, position the nearby downspout to direct rain flow into the Water barrel. “Ensure that the diverter or spigot on the barrel is directed away from your foundation,” Cornacchione said.

Be sure your Water container is properly protected from mosquitos and critters that may try to get inside; that means using a lid and/or screen on a homemade rain barrel.

“Regularly clean your gutters, too,” said Cornacchione. “And don’t use the water for human consumption, as it may contain animal waste, residue from your roof and bacteria.”

Also, “be prepared to drain and store the rain barrel inside your garage for the winter,” Isler said.

Lastly, don’t rely on your rain barrel as a one-stop watering solution.

“One Rain Water barrel will not collect enough water to substitute as a full irrigation system, unless you have a very small lawn and few plants,” Schifman said.

For More Information On Rain Barrels Visit BayTec Containers at www.baytec.net or call 800.560.2334