

Harvesting Rainwater: An Old Idea with a New Following!

Collecting rainwater to use during dry months is an ancient and traditional practice. Rainwater was collected in simple clay containers as far back as 2,000 years ago.

More homeowners in the United States are harvesting rainwater to save money and conserve this natural resource in the face of rising municipal water prices and increased drought frequency.

Potable water is not an infinite resource. In part of the U.S., most municipal water comes from overstressed underground aquifers. Communities are drawing out more water than the aquifers naturally receive to recharge. As people become aware of water shortages, they seek ways to minimize their impact on municipal water supplies. Rain barrels are part of the solution.

Safety & Maintenance Concerns

Water stored in any kind of container represents a risk for small children and animals. They can drown in as little as a few inches of water. Ensure all rain barrels have a secured top.

Mosquitos breed in standing water. To reduce the spread of West Nile virus, use a fine screen over the top of the barrel where the water enters and securely seal all other openings with water-proof silicone caulk to prevent mosquitoes from entering the rain barrel.

Make sure rain barrels are food-grade containers made to hold liquid. Install it on level and stable ground.

Finally, always monitor the rain barrels for overflow to avoid damage to your home's foundation.

Rain Barrels



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Tips for

Rain Barrels

How do I start?

There are multiple types of rainwater harvesting systems, ranging in price, you can choose from. Review the options available on the market, and see which systems in your price range meet your home set-up needs. Browse rain barrels at [Clean Air Gardening](#) or [Rainsaver USA](#).

The easiest way to harvest rainwater on a budget or in a small space is putting a rain barrel under gutter downspouts. This type of collection system can use one barrel or connect several barrels together with PVC pipes or hose. Using a small pump to get pressurized water to your garden is another option. Bigger and more complex systems use gravity to feed water from gutters to a larger cistern, which pumps water to the landscape.

Whatever you pick, use covers to reduce safety risks, keep mosquitos out, and keep the water from accumulating leaves and other contaminants.

Why harvest rainwater with rain barrels?

Rainwater harvesting reduces stormwater runoff from roofs and yards, they conserve water, and they reduce municipal water use and save residents money. Rain barrels are beneficial for rural residents with personal wells too because rainwater is a natural soft water that is great for watering landscapes, gardens or houseplants.

Rain barrels help to reduce stormwater pollution. When rain falls it picks up pollutants including chemicals from lawns and roads, and then washes into storm drains and on to local streams. Collecting rain off roofs diminishes the amount of rain washing out downspouts and over landscapes. Rain barrels provide a clean, ready to use water supply and helps keep pollutants out of lakes, rivers, and streams.

Safe Rainwater Harvesting Catchments

Any catchment area will pick up some leaves, bird droppings, dust, and other natural contaminants. Collected rain water is safe to use on gardens, landscaping, and house plants, but would require a quality filtration system to be safe to drink. Some roofs, such as old tar & gravel, asbestos shingle roofs, or treated cedar shakes are not recommended for water harvesting.

The type or condition of your gutters may impact the quality and safety of your harvested rainwater. Some gutter systems may have lead soldering or lead-based paints. Also, if you live near heavy industrial pollution, your rainwater itself may contain some undesirable contaminants. Talk to your local municipal government about the issue of environmental contaminants in your area that may affect rainwater quality.