Rain Barrels

Good for Water Quality, Good for your Garden!

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

Conservation Series

When it rains, water from roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and roads is directed to storm drain inlets and travels, unfiltered and untreated, straight to the nearest stream or river. Rain barrels help by reducing runoff that would otherwise contribute to stormwater pollution, a leading cause of poor water quality and urban flooding. Water collected from rooftops can be used to water vegetable gardens, trees, container plants, and flowerbeds. Using rain barrels provides an alternative, free water supply for outdoor use that plants appreciate: rain water is soft and free of salts, minerals, and chemicals found in municipal water and groundwater.

A Solution to Stormwater Pollution?

Impervious surfaces including roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and roads generate a significant amount of runoff during even a small rainstorm. This water often flows to storm drain inlets that are directly connected to the nearest stream or river. Without filtration or treatment, runoff picks up a variety of pollutants: pesticides, litter, fluids from leaky cars, nutrient-rich fertilizers, and pet waste with disease-causing organisms.

Is isn't only the pollutants in stormwater runoff that are a problem, but its sheer volume. Since precipitation isn't able to sink it as it would in a naturally wooded and undeveloped area, our creeks and streams are often overwhelmed when receiving large amounts of water that erode and scour streambanks. This impairs important habitat, muddies water, and threatens property.

Things to remember when using a rain barrel:

- ✓ Open inlets must be covered by a mesh screen to prevent debris and mosquitoes from entering the rain barrel.
- ✓ Downspout diverters allow excess rain water to flow down the downspout drain when the rain barrel is full. Some municipalities do not allow downspout disconnection, so either a diverter should be used or the overflow must be directed back into the downspout outlet pipe. Many models now come with diverters, or can be purchased separately.
- ✓ Do not use collected water for drinking, cooking or bathing.
- ✓ Remember to elevate your barrel at least 2' for good water pressure. Ensure your stand is level and sturdy to accommodate the weight.
- ✓ Keep the barrel secure and lid tightened so that children and animals cannot topple or access it.
- ✓ For additional capacity, connect multiple barrels.

Frequently Asked Rain Barrel Questions

Why should I use a rain barrel?

Your rain barrel provides a good way to conserve water and reduce harmful stormwater runoff. The average household devotes 30% of its water to outdoor uses, mostly for watering lawns and gardens. Rain barrels help alleviate this need by storing rainwater from your rooftop for use in your garden, watering your lawn, or even washing your car. You can save money on your water bill and reduce the runoff to streams at the same time.

How can I use the water I collect?

Elevate your barrel a few feet on blocks or bricks so that a watering can or bucket can be placed under the spigot. Raising the barrel will increase the pressure but it still won't be sufficient for a sprinkler or garden hose. A soaker hose is a good option for gradually watering your plants and emptying the barrel. Most rain barrels also have a spigot so you can collect the water with a can and use for watering house plants, too.

Can I use rain barrel water for my vegetable garden?

Rain water from your roof can contain air pollution, bird droppings, and byproducts from asphalt shingles. Though many gardeners consider it safe to use on ornamental and vegetable gardens, you may wish to consider bypassing the "first flush", and apply the water to the soil around your plants rather than on the plants themselves. Soil and compost act as filters that trap and clean pollutants.

My rain barrel has mosquitoes! What do I do?

Mosquito larva will enter through leaf debris in your gutter or an unsecured lid/opening. Cleaning gutters and regularly emptying your barrel will prevent mosquito development or interrupt their life cycle. Mosquito dunks are also effective and widely available at most hardware stores.

What can I do if my rain barrel overflows?

Short rainstorms will quickly fill your barrel. Using your water regularly between rain ensures it's empty before the next rainfall. Ensure that your barrel doesn't overflow by using a diverter, or connecting a hose to the overflow outlet and directing it at least 6' away from your building's foundation.

Community Backyards Rebate Program

For more information on rain barrels, and how Franklin County residents can qualify for one $50 reimbursement on the purchase of an approved rain barrel with diverter, visit **communitybackyards.org**.

Eligible residents who participate in Community Backyards can receive a voucher entitling them to a rebate once they purchase and properly install a rain barrel on their property. Questions? Call (614) 486-9613.

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District
Creating Conservation Solutions for Over 70 Years

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