



Rain Barrel Frequently Asked Questions

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What are rain barrels?

A rain barrel is a large container that is used to collect and store rainwater. The rain that falls on your roof is directed into the rain barrel through your downspout. Rain barrels are a simple, efficient, low-cost method for homeowners to conserve water.

Why should I collect rain?

When we think of rain as a precious fresh water resource, it doesn't make sense to manage it like a waste product. Capturing rainwater in a rain barrel gives us clean water to offset our household water usage.

Collecting rain instead of letting it flow off our property as stormwater runoff helps to reduce local flooding and stress on storm sewer infrastructure. Since stormwater runoff picks up pollutants as it flows over the landscape before ending up in local waterways, reducing stormwater runoff also protects local rivers and streams.



How do I use the water that I've collected in my rain barrel?

Use the water in your rain barrel between storms. Water collected in rain barrels is great for watering lawns, gardens and houseplants. You can also use the water to wash your windows, cars or pets! To use, attach a hose to the bottom valve and direct to landscaping, or simply fill buckets or watering cans.

Even if you don't have an intended use for the water, emptying the rain barrel after a storm reduces the rate and volume of stormwater the storm sewer system and our rivers have to manage at a peak time.

Can rain barrels reduce flooding in my neighborhood?

Each and every rain barrel contributes to reducing stormwater runoff in your community. When we collect stormwater in rain barrels and use it at a later time when your lawn is not saturated with stormwater, more water stays on your property. This means there is less stormwater runoff to strain storm sewer infrastructure and overwhelm local rivers and streams, resulting in less flooding in your neighborhood.

Where can I buy a rain barrel?

The Conservation Foundation sells rain barrels year-round through a partnership with Upcycle Products, Inc. The 55-gallon rain barrels are made of recycled food-grade plastic, come in a variety of colors and can be purchased online for \$60 (plus tax). Home delivery is available for \$5 more. Barrels can also be purchased in person at The Conservation Foundation's headquarters at McDonald Farm or area events for \$65 (includes tax).

Buy a rain barrel online at www.dupagerivers.org/order-rain-barrel. Rain barrel accessories, such as a wood pedestal and flex elbow, are also available for purchase.

Several communities have also partnered with The Conservation Foundation and Upcycle Products to sell rain barrels to their residents. Check your community's website to see if they have a rain barrel program.

Purchase a rain barrel at
www.dupagerivers.org/order-rain-barrel

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What material is the rain barrel made out of?

The Conservation Foundation's rain barrels are made of food-grade recycled plastic. The rain barrels are made from containers once used to ship bulk food, such as olives.

The rain barrels are 55-gallon containers, stand about 4 feet tall and weigh 400 pounds when full of water.

How do I install a rain barrel?

Rain barrels work best when placed on a stand or concrete blocks under a downspout. The added height increases water pressure and provides space for a bucket or watering can to be placed under the valve.

Once the rain barrel is positioned on the platform, measure and cut the downspout to a length just above the top of a barrel. Downspouts can be cut with a hacksaw. Save the cut-off for reattachment in the winter.

Attach two elbows or a flex-elbow connector (available at most hardware stores or on the rain barrel online order website) to the downspout to direct water to the top of the barrel. There are two sizes of flex-elbows (2x3" and 3x4"), so measure your downspout before buying.

For a visual, view this guide or video for installation tips:

Guide: www.dupagerivers.org/rain-barrel-guide

Video: www.dupagerivers.org/rain-barrel-video

Can I leave my rain barrel out during the winter?

If the barrel fills with water and freezes, it may crack. In the fall, we recommend you empty the rain barrel, properly store it outside or bring it inside, and replace the downspout. If you'd like to leave the barrel outside, turn it upside-down and weigh it down.

Do rain barrels attract mosquitos?

Any standing water is attractive to mosquitos. Fortunately, the rain barrels have screw-off lids with a screen to keep debris and insects from the water—including mosquitos!

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What happens if I forget to use the water or empty the rain barrel between storms?

We encourage you to use the clean rainwater as a resource to offset your household water use! However, you can attach a garden hose to the overflow fitting on the top part of the barrel. When the barrel fills up, additional water will be directed away from the foundation of your house and keep the water level below the screening to prevent mosquitos. You can also attach a diverter to the downspout which allows rainwater to continue out the downspout when the barrel is full.

What else can I do to manage stormwater on my property?

Add native plants to your landscape! Native plants have deep root systems that help infiltrate rainwater into the soil. Native plants not only reduce stormwater runoff, but also create beautiful gardens and provide habitat for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects.

Rain gardens also help manage stormwater at home. Rain gardens are shallow depressions (or low areas on your property) planted with deep-rooted native plants accustomed to wet conditions. Create a rain garden and direct water from the downspout or sump pump into it. Find more information about rain gardens at www.dupagerivers.org/benefits-of-rain-gardens

You may also consider permeable pavers for your driveway or patio. These pavers reduce runoff at the source by allowing water to seep into the ground around the pavers. They also improve water quality by filtering out pollutants as stormwater flows through the rock layers installed below the pavers.

