



How to Build a Rain Barrel

By Jim Hillibish

Remember that old rain barrel at the corner of nearly every house in town? Probably not. Rainwater collecting was eclipsed by municipal water systems. Well, the rain barrels are back. Gardeners are rediscovering these water recyclers that save money and offer the benefits of untreated H₂O from the sky. Nearly everybody already has the most important part - a gutter downspout shooting roof water into a pipe or yard. Rainwater is good stuff and worth collecting. It has none of the chemicals added to sanitize drinking water. It's naturally soft and of course, free.

Construction

If you're lucky, your downspout will have a slip joint close to the barrel top. If not, cut the tube to fit your barrel. Keep the remaining spouting for reconnecting.

Barrels must be stored over winter. Water in them will freeze and expand.

You'll need an overflow that doubles as an air vent as the barrel fills. I drilled three holes in the lid and covered them with screen pieces secured with silicon caulk. This does double duty as a mosquito repellent. Rain barrels can be perfect habitats for them.

Finally, clean out your gutters to increase water flow and avoid debris.

For high capacity, you can link two or three barrels with short lengths of hose near the tops.

Is it worth while? A mere 0.3 inch of rain on a 1,200 square foot roof will fill a 35 gallon barrel. Without a rain barrel, this will wind up in the storm sewer - a terrible waste of an increasingly valuable source.

Homemade Rain Barrel

1 35-gallon heavy duty round trash can with lid, \$10

1 ¾" hose bib faucet, \$4

2 galvanized steel washers to fit the bib, \$2

1 PVC nut to fit the nipple of the bib, \$1

1 washing-machine hose, \$6

Piece of window screen or plastic mesh

1 tube silicon rubber sealant, \$4

Cut your downspout, leaving enough length to fit through the lid. Place the barrel under it and mark around it for the top hole. Cut the hole on the lid with tin snips or a knife to fit your downspout.

With a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch hole saw, drill the drain hole 2 inches above the can bottom. Place a washer on the bib nipple, install through the hole and add the second washer inside. Screw securely with the nut, placing the spout at a right angle.

Glue around both washers with silicon. Install washer hose.

Drill three $\frac{3}{4}$ inch holes in the lid. Spread silicon around them on the underside and install squares of screening or plastic mesh. Allow silicon to dry for 24 hours.

Attach the lid to the downspout and then to the can.

Use the washer hose to fill a watering can or attach to a garden house.