



Conserving Water

Solutions for Your Landscape

UF UNIVERSITY of
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IFAS Extension

Capturing Water with Rain Barrels

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/water>

A fun way to save water—and money on your water bill—is to build or purchase a rain barrel. A rain barrel captures rainwater, which can then be used to water plants.

Benefits of Rain Barrels

Much of the rain we get in Florida comes in the summer. But wouldn't it be great if you could save some of that rain for other times of the year?



The great thing about rain barrels is that you can save some water for dry times. And because you're not getting the water from the public water system, you can use your rain barrel to water whenever you want—including when your area is under water restrictions.

Installing a spigot on a rain barrel makes it easy to fill a watering can for handwatering plants. They can also be hooked up to seep irrigation systems. They can (and should) be made mosquito-proof with a tight-fitting lid and mesh screen, and can be painted or hidden by foliage or a trellis to make them more attractive.

Rain barrels can capture a significant amount of water, and can have a very tangible effect on your water bill. Best of all, they're fairly easy to find in stores and to make!

Rain Barrel Construction

Rain barrels are generally 50- to 80-gallon containers fitted with a fine screen to keep out leaves, insects, and other potential contaminants and a tap or small pump for distributing the water. They're generally attached to a downspout to capture rainwater than lands on the roof, and can range from fairly simple and cheap to pretty complex and expensive. There's a lot of information online about building a rain barrel system for your home.

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You can purchase a rain barrel from many garden centers and large home improvement centers. If you can find the container, you can modify it yourself. Use only a food-grade drum used to carry juice, olives, pickles, etc.—be sure that has never been used to store chemicals. Or you can contact your county Extension office. Many county Extension offices offer free workshops about using rain barrels, offering the containers to participants for free or a small fee.



How Does It Work?

Rain that lands on your roof and flows off through storm gutters and drains is funneled into the rain barrel through a hole in its lid, where the water sits until you need to use it. You fill a watering can or connect a hose through a valve near the bottom of the barrel.

For every inch of rain that falls on 1,000 square feet of roof area, about 600 gallons of rainwater can be collected. Your roof area is equal to the total square feet of your house plus the extension of your eaves.

Of course, you won't be able to capture every single drop that falls onto your house. Anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of the rainwater that hits your roof may be lost to evaporation, the wind, and gutter spillage. And your rain barrel could simply fill up before it stops raining! (You may want to install more than one around your house.)

How to Use Your Rain Barrel

Always keep your rain barrel covered, to keep out mosquitoes, leaves, and other intruders. Before you install it, think about how you'll use the water in it. Will you handwater? If so, you'll just need a tap near the bottom to fill up your watering can and you may want to elevate the barrel to more easily access the spigot. If you plan to water planting beds, you may want to set up some kind of seep irrigation system that draws water from the barrel.

Monitor your rain barrel regularly for overflow. If you're away from home for an extended period of time, a heavy rain could cause overflow, which could possibly lead to damage to the foundation of your home or other problems. To avoid this, disconnect the downspout from the rain barrel and cover the screen on top of the barrel.