



What are the benefits to using rain barrels?

- Help reduce basement backups for houses with roof drains connected to the sewer
- Naturally soft water with no additives is better for your plants.
- Lower your water bill.
- Decrease energy consumption used to treat waste water and delay building/expanding waste-water treatment plants.
- Reduce water pollution in our rivers and lakes by reducing stormwater runoff.
- Rain barrel-gathered water is not subject to community watering restrictions.

Why is storm water bad for rivers, lakes and other natural bodies of water?

It isn't the water that falls directly from the sky onto the lakes that is the problem—it is the storm water that runs over impervious surfaces and ends up flowing in fast, hot and dirty. It can pick up pet and livestock waste, fertilizers, pesticides, detergents, trash, invasive plant seeds, automotive liquids like motor oil, antifreeze, brake fluid, leaves, grass clippings and more. All of these elements have detrimental effects on the quality of the water in lakes, rivers, streams and oceans. Also in St. Louis City and parts of the County, the sanitary sewer system is combined with street drainage that handles rainwater runoff. During heavy rains, the sanitary system backs up due to lack of capacity and releases raw sewage into streams.

Rain barrels and rain gardens can help you have a direct impact on all these issues by temporarily holding water back from the system. In nature, this delay occurs because rainwater soaks into the ground instead of running across pavement. Obviously we can't remove our houses and streets, so we use rain barrels and rain gardens to create a delay.

My roof is pretty small-is it even worth me getting a rain barrel?

Generally speaking, yes. One inch of rain on a 1000 square-foot roof will generate about 600 gallons of runoff. As an example, your two-story home is 1600 square feet of total living space with a roof area of 800 square feet. You have two roof drains, each collecting water from 400 square feet. For one roof drain, you only need two (2) 60-gallon rain barrels to capture approximately 0.5 inches of rain.

Can I drink the water from my rain barrel?

Absolutely not.

To Keep Garden Produce Safe, How Should I Use the Water Collected in the Rain Barrel?

The consensus is that there is not a clear consensus. There are significant and reasonable concerns about using rooftop harvested rainwater for watering food plants. To paraphrase a famous adage: Caution is the better part of good health. There are many variables to consider, including what part of the country you live in and what your roof is composed of.

As the water collected in the rain barrel is coming off a roof, into gutters and down downspouts, it is not considered to be “drinkable” or potable water. Remember, birds and animals are also on the roof. So, water from the roof can contain bacteria and other disease-causing organisms from bird and other animal waste that might be on the roof. How you use this water in your garden and the type of plants you use it on is an important consideration. Rain barrel water is fine if used to water non- edible plants – like flowers or lawns.



Rain barrels that collect water from copper roofs or from roofs where wooden shingles or shakes have been treated with CCA (chromated copper arsenate) to prevent moss or algae growth should not be used on edible plants. If you have treated your roof with chemicals or installed zinc strips to prevent moss or algae growth, you should also not use the water in your rain barrel in your vegetable garden. Other considerations include the potential for air pollution in your area. Water flowing from your roof can contain deposited air pollutants. However, this water may end up in your vegetable garden anyway.

But Can I Use the Water In My Vegetable Garden?

Yes, but only in the same way that other nonpotable water is used. Avoid using overhead irrigation. It is best to use this water for drip or trickle irrigation. This prevents contamination of edible above the ground plant parts that are hard to clean, especially leafy greens. However, the vegetable is not safe to eat unless it is thoroughly washed using “drinkable” water first. Rain barrel water should not be used close to harvest time to water the vegetable garden and should NEVER be used to wash fruits or vegetables from the garden or orchard prior to consumption.

How do I control mosquitoes in my rain barrel?

Unlike many rain barrels that use a screened, open-top style inflow, barrels made by the River des Peres Watershed Coalition use an inflow that is sealed to prevent entry of mosquitoes. However, our rain barrels may be susceptible to mosquitoes that can navigate the 6+ feet of outflow pipe. If you find that mosquitoes can get in your barrel, simply use a screwdriver to remove the outflow hose clamp and attach a small piece of screen to the outflow pipe connection. Check the screen one or twice a year to ensure it is not breaking down and no holes are present. Another option includes using larvicides, such as Mosquito Dunks, that can be found in local hardware or garden stores that will eliminate the growth of larvae. The chemical content should be checked before purchasing in order to ensure safety to plants, pets, and people.

I don't like the color-can I paint my barrel?

The barrels are made from high-density-polyethylene (HDPE), which is notoriously hard to get paint to stick to. We have not found an environmentally-friendly paint that will adhere to the barrel. There are, however, spray-paint companies that make a paint specifically for plastics (Krylon "Fusion").

Are there any other ways I can 'disguise' my barrel?

We recommend placing 'chicken-wire' around your barrel and training some sort of native vining plant up the wire. Some people have built aesthetically-pleasing enclosures for the barrel. Another option is to site the barrel hidden among bushes/shrubs to make it less noticeable.

When should I disconnect my rain barrel in the fall? And re-connect it in the spring?

You should disconnect your rain barrel before the first hard freeze. If you empty all water out of your barrel, you can keep it attached for a few weeks more, just make sure you are completely emptying it out every time it fills.

You should wait until the first good rain of the springtime has fallen before reattaching your rain barrel. The first good rain will flush considerably more debris from the roof and gutters than subsequent rains. Attaching your rain barrel before this point will increase the chances of clogging.



How do I clean the inside of the rain barrel?

It is recommended washing the barrel when disconnecting it for the season. Use an environmentally-friendly solution of 2 tsp. of castile soap + 2 tsp. vinegar or lemon juice per gallon of water for cleaning, swishing the solution around inside the barrel then rinsing the inside of the barrel with a garden hose. A concentrated nozzle spray will work well to remove residue from the inside of the barrel.

The water in my barrel has an odor and/or algae growing in it.

This is natural if the water sits in your barrel for a while. It's the same thing that happens with some lakes, especially when the weather has been very warm. You can ignore it, use the water faster, or check pond or gardening stores for additives that are safe for your plants.

Are rain barrels allowed by building codes?

- City – Within the City of St Louis, the Department of Public Safety Division of Building and Inspection issued a policy memorandum for new construction that allows disconnection of roof drains from the sanitary sewer provided that it does not create a nuisance and that construction documents detailing the alternate discharge are signed and sealed by a professional engineer. However, simply adding a rain barrel appears to be allowable without construction documents as long as the overflow hose is directed to the same pipe to which the roofdrain is currently connected (i.e. connected to the sanitary sewer).
- County – Because St. Louis county is comprised of nearly 100 municipalities, it is difficult to ascertain the policy of each muni. MSD conducted a survey to do just that. Initial assessment indicates that the majority of the muni.'s have no problem with disconnecting roof drainage from the sanitary sewer as long as the alternate discharge does not create nuisance or flooding. However, you might consider inquiring with your municipality permitting department to be sure.

What is the pressure of water in a rain barrel?

Typical water pressure for an outdoor spigot is 30-50 psi. In typical situations, our rain barrels generate under 2 PSI, which is not sufficient to power a spray nozzle. However, this pressure is perfect drip irrigation using soaker hoses. Please note that you'll need soaker hoses designed specifically for this low-pressure situation. If you don't want to install a drip irrigation system, simply use a standard garden hose to water thirsty trees and shrubs or fill watering cans right out of the rain barrel spigot.

In some situations, the location of the roof drain (and therefore the location of the rain barrel) is elevated below the area where you'd like to deliver the water. An affordable option (apprx. \$50) to allow you to water trees and shrubs is to use a small submersible water garden pond-pump. However, these pumps will not drive a spray nozzle.

(example of one available rain barrel soaker hose <http://www.rainbarrelsoakerhose.com>)