

Water Conservation Tips

RAIN BARRELS: A Gardener's Answer to Dry Summer Weather

Rainwater Collection is not a new concept. For thousands of years people have been using collected rainwater for various uses in areas where the ground or surface water is scarce or the quality unsafe. The technology continues to be used today in both developing and modern countries for potable and irrigation purposes. Collection systems range from 10,000-gallon capacity cisterns to 40-gallon rain barrels. Our water source, Lake Whatcom, supplies approximately 86,000 people with water, 80% of which are Bellingham residents and 20% Whatcom County residents. During the months of May to September, the City receives only 5-inches of rainfall, about 1/5 of the total rainfall for the entire year!

Collected Rainwater can be used to:

- Water your garden
- Water your lawn
- Water your indoor plants
- Wash your car
- Wash your pets
- Fill your iron
- Fill the Play Pool

With the City's population continuing to grow, the Chinook salmon listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, and the climatic changes affecting Northwest rainfall, water conservation is something each and every one of us need to think about as well as practice.

Rain barrels are an excellent way to practice water conservation. Plants love soft, chemical-free rainwater, and by having and using a rain barrel, you are doing your part to conserve our finite resource.

The collection of roof rainwater can be used for several purposes: watering your lawn or garden, washing cars or pets, and for indoor plants. The water in your rainbarrel however, is **NOT POTABLE**. Do not use this water for drinking, washing or cooking. The collected roof rainwater will most likely contain small amounts of fecal coliform bacteria from bird droppings and other microbes. Some things to consider before purchasing or making your own rainbarrel are to:



- Use a tight-fitting lid and screen to keep leaves, debris, mosquitoes, animals and children out of the water
- Use an overflow device such as a hose to direct excess water away from your house and foundation and into a flowerbed or garbage can for extra storage.
- Frequently check the rain barrel to ensure intake and overflows are not blocked.





Rain Barrel Retailers

Rain barrel retailers can be found all across the United States, and the Internet has over one hundred websites to access and order from. Listed below are a variety of suppliers:

Clean Air Gardening Supplies

www.cleanairgardening.com/rainbarrels.html

Spruce Creek Rainsaver

www.sprucecreekrainsaver.com/barrel.html

Real Goods

www.realgoods.com

Water Savers

www.watersavers.com

Midwest Internet Sales

www.rainbarrelsandmore.com

Rainsaver Systems

www.rainsaverusa.com

Rainpail

www.rainpail.com

Natural Rainwater

www.naturalrainwater.com

Garden Water Saver

www.gardenwatersaver.com

Gardener's Supply Company

www.gardeners.com

For a more cost-effective approach, you can also make your own rain barrel! For about \$30-\$50, you can purchase all of the materials necessary to make your own rain barrel. The following local businesses supply FOOD-GRADE plastic barrels (always use food-grade drums) and any local hardware store will carry the tools and hardware you need. The City of Bellingham also provides an instructional brochure that will help guide you through the process.

Z Recyclers Inc.

6129 Guide Meridian

360-398-2161

*55-gallon food-grade barrels: \$10 + tax

Cenex

3500 Meridian St.

360-734-4010

*55-gallon food-grade barrels: \$19.95

If you have questions or comments about this info-sheet or would like more information, please contact Anitra Accetturo, Water Conservation Programs Coordinator.

How much water can a rainbarrel collect from my roof?

Remember that one inch of rain falling on one-square foot (sf) surface equals .623 gallons of water.

If you have a 1,000 sf-surface, you could potentially collect up to **623 gallons** of water!



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The City of Bellingham does not recommend or endorse any of the above companies and/or retailers. There are many more businesses that sell products for rainwater catchment and storage. This is just a sample list for your information.