



# RAIN BARRELS



Portland Water District

~managing roof runoff in your backyard~



**Purpose:** Rain barrels provide an innovative way to capture rainwater from your roof, and store it for later use. Water collected from rain barrels can be used to water lawns, gardens, and indoor plants. This water would otherwise run off your roof or through downspouts and become stormwater, picking up pollutants on its way to a storm drain, stream, or lake. You can lower your water bill, conserve well water in the dry season, and reduce polluted stormwater runoff.

**Installation:** A rain barrel must be placed on a level surface. If you have gutters, place the rain barrel beneath the downspout so the water flows onto the screen on top of the barrel. You may need to have your downspout cut to an appropriate height above your rain barrel.

If you do not have gutters, find a location where water concentrates from your roof and place the rain barrel where it will capture this steady stream of water during rain storms.

Elevate your rain barrel by placing it on cinder blocks or a sturdy wooden frame. Raising the barrel allows the barrel to drain properly, and you to easily fit a watering can underneath the spout, or attach a hose so you can recover the rainwater you have collected. Soaker hoses can also be attached to the rain barrel to slowly release water into gardens and recharge groundwater.



**Materials:** Rain barrels are available in many sizes and styles, and range in price from \$80 to over \$200. Contact your local hardware store, garden center, or nursery. You can also order rain barrels on-line from SkyJuice New England <http://www.skyjuice.us>.

Building your own rain barrel is usually the least expensive option. Several web sites exist with material lists and clear directions. Sites are as follows:

- <http://www.ci.superior.wi.us/publicwks/wastewater/RainBarrelInstructions.htm>
- [http://www.cwp.org/Community\\_Watersheds/brochure.pdf](http://www.cwp.org/Community_Watersheds/brochure.pdf)
- <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/ed/rainbarrel.html>

Finally, you can simply use an open barrel to collect rainwater. Keep in mind that you should use the water within two weeks because the development of a mosquito from egg to adult takes 10 to 14 days.

**Maintenance:** Gutters and downspouts should be clean of debris. Leaves and pine needles can clog gutters and prevent water from reaching the rain barrel. Furthermore, check the screen on the rain barrel after each storm event and remove leaves or pollen that has plugged the screen.

Freezing water can damage your barrel. Rain barrels should be drained and stored before freezing weather sets in to prevent ice damage. They can be stored outside if they are turned upside down and the faucet is covered. Be sure to put something heavy on your rain barrel so it doesn't roll away. Rain barrels can also be stored inside a garage or other protected area.

Part of the **Conservation Practices for Homeowners** Factsheet Series, available at:  
Maine DEP (800.452.1942); <http://www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/docwatershed/materials.htm>  
Portland Water District (207.774.5961); <http://www.pwd.org/news/publications.php>