

Best Practices in Sustainability Residential Rain Barrels

conserve water · minimize costs · reduce stormwater runoff



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

What are rain barrels?

Residential rain barrels capture and temporarily store rainwater runoff from your roof so you can use the water later for your lawn, garden or outdoor plants. Rain barrels are connected to your home's downspout and are equipped with a spigot to direct water and an overflow hose in case the rain continues once the barrel is full.

Limitations

In 2016, Colorado House Bill 16-1005 made it legal in Colorado for most households to use rain barrels with the following limitations:

- Collected rainwater is **not** safe to drink and cannot be used for indoor use. Furthermore, to lower your risk of getting sick, avoid using rainwater collected in the barrel for watering plants that you intend to eat.
- Each household is limited to no more than two barrels with a 110 gallon maximum storage capacity.

Homeowner's associations (HOA) legally cannot ban the use of rain barrels, but they may have specific location and appearance guidelines.

Set-up and use

Rain barrels are commonly made from food-grade plastic barrels, but can also be made of wood. Pre-made rain barrels are available from a number of Colorado hardware stores and garden centers and range in price from \$50 to \$200. All approved barrels must have a sealable lid to control mosquito breeding and reduce risk of accidental drowning for small children.

Consider purchasing a barrel that comes with a first-flush device which prevents the first several gallons—typically the dirtiest water—from reaching the barrel. This helps to reduce health risks and improves the water quality in the barrel. When installing your rain barrel, ensure that it is on a stable foundation to prevent accidental tipping.

Maintenance

Properly maintaining your barrel is important to reduce health hazards and control mosquito breeding while prolonging the life of your barrel.

- **Inspect** - Check gutters, debris filter and overflow pipe monthly. Remove leaves and other debris from the screens. Ensure screens are securely fastened and free of holes. Ensure lid maintains a strong seal.
- **Empty** - Using collected water regularly ensures there is room for another storm event. The rain barrel should be completely emptied at least once a month.
- **Clean** - Dirty rain barrels may become a health hazard. Clean your barrel each season with a non-toxic substance such as vinegar.
- **Store** - Drain, clean and store your rain barrel before winter. This protects the barrel and prevents damage.

Benefits of Rain Barrels

- Reduce tap water use;
- Minimize water bill;
- Reduce environmental impact from stormwater runoff; and
- Reduce energy used to treat and transport potable water.



For more information:



<http://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/natres/06707.pdf>