

## **What Can a Rain Barrel do for you?**

We all know that when it rains, it pours, and with the right rain barrel(s), that water can be saved. This is called rainwater harvesting, and it is important because it decreases the high demand for domestic water. Residential irrigation can account for up to 40% of water consumption. By collecting rain water and storing it in a rain barrel you'll have water for future use, whether it's for watering the garden or just keeping it handy for emergency situations. An easy way to conserve water and money is by using a rain barrel.

With rain water being one of the most abundant and consistently available natural resources, its harvesting and conservation is an effective way to cut down the cost of water usage in the household and help alleviate the burden of imposing water shortages. Strategic placement of a rain barrel underneath the gutters of your home can provide a barrel full of rain water with just one-quarter of an inch of rain, which in turn can be used in practical ways such as watering your flowers and garden or even washing your car. With enough rain water saved up throughout the year (and depending on how many barrels you're using), you might never have to use the garden hose for an entire summer. The benefits of having one does wonders for people who tend to use the garden hose on a liberal basis, saving not just a good chunk of pocket change but also providing fresher and purer natural soft water for your plants. Not only are you saving on tap water usage, you're helping to filter out deposits like calcium and lime, and chemicals like chlorine from your plants, lawn, and underground water.

The first requirement for setting up your rain barrel is determining your options for a source of rainwater. Many houses have a number of downspouts to choose from. In this case, choose the downspout closest to where you will use the rainwater. For example, if you plan to use the water in your garden, position the barrel near the back of the house where it's close to the garden. Some houses don't have gutters and downspouts. You can even use a very inexpensive gutter and downspout during the rainy season, then uninstall it and store it in winter.

Once you've decided where to place the rain barrel, a flat, level surface for placement of your barrel is key, a full 55-gallon rain barrel can weigh nearly 500 pounds - you don't want the rain barrel to tip over. Build a solid foundation for the barrel using pressure treated wood or cinder blocks. Be sure to leave an open space under the spigot to accommodate a watering can or hose. Determine where the barrel's water overflow pipe will be positioned (always away from your home's foundation). If you need more water than one barrel full (typically 55 gallons), you can link barrels together.

To route the water from the downspout to the barrel, you will need to remove a section of your downspout to redirect water into your barrel. You can: 1) terminate the downspout a couple of inches above the barrel and install an elbow fitting at the end pointing into the barrel, 2) configure the downspout so it enters all the way into the barrel, or 3) use a special fitting called the downspout diverter to transport water from inside the downspout, through a tube to the barrel.

The most basic way to keep debris, insects and children out of your rain barrel is to make sure it has a tight fitting lid. Use a debris screen to stop leaves and other tree parts from traveling through the downspout and into the barrel. If debris gathers in the bottom of the barrel, it will clog the spigot at the bottom of the barrel and in some models the overflow tube and affect the transport of water away from your house. Instead, the water will be forced out the top of the barrel, then run along the side to create a destructive puddle right beside your foundation. Many debris screens are installed at the end of the downspout. You can even include a filtering pad on top of the screen to soften the sound of rain and filter out smaller pieces of debris.

For winter storage empty or drain your rain barrel, open the spigot, remove the run-off hose, and reconnect your downspout. When possible store your barrel in a protected/indoor area but if the rain barrel must remain outside turn it upside down and secure it to prevent animal intrusion or water accumulation which can freeze, expand, and potentially crack the barrel wall.

**To purchase a rain barrel from the Bowie Lions Club, call 301-262-2665.**