

## Garden Update

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### Rain Barrels

A recent brief rain burst, depositing just .2 of an inch in my rain gauge, put 12 gallons of water in my rain barrel. That's the beauty of collecting rainwater from a roof—a small amount adds up quickly.

If you've been considering installing a rain barrel, here is a push to get you started. While rainwater doesn't carry a lot of dissolved stone like hard water does, using rainwater benefits plants in ways that hard water never can and without the detrimental residual salts associated with water-softened water. Rainwater has trace elements good for plants, has a pH that is slightly acidic (also good for plants), and since it is the same temperature as the outdoors, won't shock plant roots when watered in.

Capturing rainwater is not a new concept. Our foremothers and forefathers certainly knew of the benefits of catching rainwater. Utilizing roof gutters and downspouts, rainwater was collected in underground cisterns and provided quality water to use in gardens. Today, rain barrels are utilized by many as a way to have access to water where a well and a water line don't exist. One community garden in just this type of situation collects water from a neighbor's roof for the community garden members to use. One happy side benefit of catching rainwater is that it doesn't add to the volume and speed of water that causes erosion.

Kits can be purchased, providing all the components necessary to set up a rain barrel. If you're pulling together the materials yourself, a used food-grade barrel is an economical start. Set the barrel up on concrete blocks to make access to the spigot easier. A downspout diverter mounted on the downspout will divert water to the regular downspout when the barrel is full. Choose a spigot that readily fits your garden hose and mount the spigot near the bottom of the barrel. Place screen over any openings at the top of the barrel to exclude egg-laying mosquitoes.

A precautionary note, if raccoons are regular visitors on the roof, rainwater should not be collected as their fecal material can readily transmit diseases to humans. More information about rain barrels may be found at Backyard Farmer at <https://byf.unl.edu/rainbarrels> .