

Harvest the Rain!

Written by Megan Finnessy, MWC Coordinator

If you're a Northwest gardener and are looking for ways to save on your water bills and ensure that your plants don't suffer in the next drought, consider an old-fashioned technology: rainwater harvesting with rain barrels.

Saving rainwater using rain barrels is an ancient practice that is again becoming popular. With the rising price of municipal water and drought restrictions facing much of the country during the summer months, more and more homeowners are turning to rainwater. Harvesting systems vary from the simple use of barrels and gravitation to high tech systems using cisterns, pumps, and flow controls.

Rain is a naturally soft water and devoid of minerals, chlorine, fluoride, and other chemicals. It is usually collected from the roofs of houses and picks up very little contamination when it falls. You can harvest a surprisingly large amount of rainwater from your gutters with one or more rain barrels. You do not need a filtration system for landscape uses; you can use it directly from your rain barrel on your garden or indoor plants.

There are a number of reasons for harvesting rainwater including saving money, water conservation, and watering with soft rainwater to improve soil ecosystems.

Perhaps the simplest use of rainwater is to put a barrel under one of the gutter downspouts and use the water on sensitive indoor plants. The plants will appreciate the soft water. Note that the barrel should be covered between uses. A slightly more sophisticated system might use several barrels connected together near the bottom with pvc pipe or hose. A small pump can be used in one of the barrels to pump the water to your garden. Bigger systems may use gravity to feed water from gutters to a larger cistern, which pumps water to the landscape.

There are many possible configurations and degrees of complexity that will all make your garden smile.