

Installing a Rain Barrel at Your Cabin

If you have a lawn at your cabin or if you're growing a garden there, then of course you need water for irrigation, and plenty of it. Instead of using water from your well or from a public water source to irrigate your lawn or garden, consider an "old-fashioned" idea: the lowly rain barrel. Rainwater harvesting is an ancient practice now enjoying a revival as people become increasingly dedicated to sound ecological practices in their daily lives. According to some sources, a quarter inch of rain falling on an average-sized roof yields about 200 gallons of water!

Rain-barrel basics

A rain barrel is simply a container that captures water that runs off your roof. The basic idea is this: You channel rainwater into the barrel; near the bottom of the barrel you'll have a spigot to which you'll connect a garden hose whenever you want to get water out of the barrel.



If your rain barrel is covered (and it should be), it will also need an opening through which excess water can escape.

How to get a rain barrel

You can buy a rain barrel from a home-supply store, a gardening center, or a hardware store. Some municipalities make rain barrels available to residents at nominal cost, as part of a water-conservation initiative – so you might also want to check with your town's conservation commission or environmental-services department to see if you can purchase a rain barrel from the town.

Of course, you can also make your own rain barrel. Any large, strong, water-tight container can be used as a rain barrel, as long as it hasn't been used to store toxic materials, as long as it's made of a material that doesn't leach toxic substances, and as long as it has a removable lid. You'll want something that can hold at least 50 gallons or so. Plastic trash barrels are good candidates. On the Internet you can find lots of tips and ideas for making your own rain barrel.

Your rain barrel should have a cover

Although some people do use uncovered rain barrels, you'll want your rain barrel to have a cover, for a few reasons. First: the cover will keep wind-blown dirt, sand, leaves and other debris out of the water. Second: a cover will ensure minimal evaporation of the collected water. Also: a covered rain barrel is less likely to become a breeding ground for mosquitoes than an uncovered one.

Your rain barrel shouldn't be a mosquito motel!

Speaking of mosquitoes: they love rain barrels because they like to lay eggs in standing, stagnant water. To keep your rain barrel mosquito-free, you really need to go beyond just putting a cover on it. There are several things you can do.

Installing a filter over the barrel's intake opening is one approach. If you're buying a ready-made rain barrel, it will probably have a filter. If you're making your own rain barrel, use old panty hose for your filter.

Another mosquito-mitigation idea is goldfish! Adding a couple of goldfish to your barrel will keep the mosquito population to a minimum, because the fish will feast on the mosquito larvae. If you do decide that your rain barrel should have goldfish as tenants, you'll need to make sure the fish get enough air. You can do this by drilling a few one-inch holes in the cover.

You can also purchase donut-shaped cakes made of a natural mosquito-killing agent. The cakes float on top of the water in your rain barrel.

Where to install your rain barrel

You'll want to install the rain barrel in a place that's close to your cabin's downspout; you'll then attach the bottom end of the downspout to the top of the barrel. If your cabin doesn't have gutters and therefore doesn't have a downspout, put the barrel under a valley in the roof where the water drains down to the edge (to catch the water, you'll need to put multiple holes in the barrel's cover).

Make sure the rain barrel sits on a level, flat, stable surface. The bottom of the barrel should be several inches above ground level so it will be easy to gain access to the spigot. Be sure to direct the overflow away from your cabin's foundation.

Beyond the basics

Here are some ways you can leverage the rain-barrel concept to the max!

- Make a rain garden and channel the overflow from your rain barrel into it.
- Daisy-chain several rain barrels together. This will allow you to collect hundreds of gallons of rainwater.
- If you're super-serious about water conservation, consider installing an underground tank for rainwater collection.
- Instead of trying to find a low-profile location for your rain barrel, take the opposite approach: decorate it! Blend it into your landscape, or feature it as a work of art.



Turn to the Internet for more details

The information in this article should get you started in the right direction. Search the Internet for detailed information about making and using a rain barrel. Once your rain barrel is in place at your cabin, you can take pride in knowing you're doing your part to conserve water on our planet.