



Rain Barrel Frequently Asked Questions

Order Now!

What is a rain barrel?

A rain barrel is container that collects and stores rain water for future uses, such as watering landscaping, and for decreasing the amount of stormwater runoff that leaves your property. A rain barrel is typically inserted under the downspout from a roof to channel rainwater into the barrel for later use. This is a technology that has been used for thousands of years!

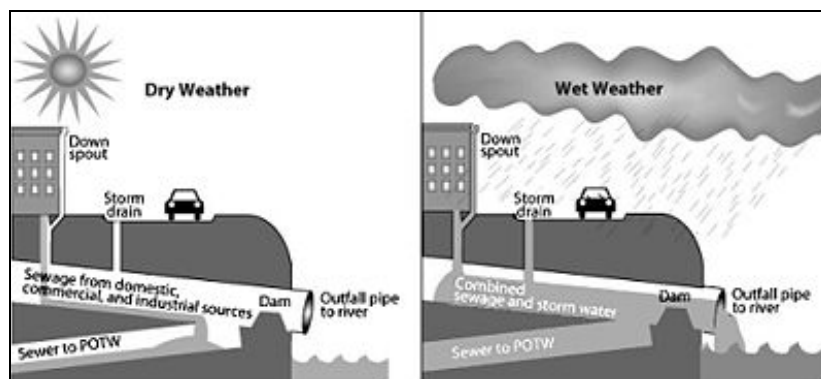
Why do we need rain barrels in the Buffalo Niagara area?

To Conserve Water

By using a rain barrel to capture rainwater, you can store water for later use for outside chores such as washing cars and windows, watering landscaping. This reduces the demand on our drinking water source and conserves precious fresh water.

To Reduce Pollution

Rain barrels also help address an important water pollution issue caused by overflowing sewers during heavy rain. The City of Buffalo and other surrounding municipalities have underground pipes that carry storm water and sanitary wastewater from the streets and our homes to the wastewater treatment plant. However, when there is too much water in the sewer system during heavy rain events, the sewers are designed to overflow into our streams, creeks, and rivers (and, ultimately, Lake Erie), releasing raw sewage, items flushed down the toilet, pathogens and bacteria, trash and toxic substances, harmful sediment and other pollutants. This image illustrates what happens to cause sewer overflows in wet weather.



Source: U. S. Environmental Protection Agency

This issue is not unique to the City of Buffalo. Approximately 770 cities across the nation have combined sewer overflow issues. Many cities—such as Chicago, Portland, Toronto, and Kansas City—are looking to residents to help reduce the amount of water flowing into the sewer by using rain barrels and rain gardens. Rainwater capture and its slow infiltration into the ground at your house reduce the volume of water into the storm sewers and reduce the sewage overflows. Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER has a goal of installing 1000 rain barrels annually to reduce stormwater overflows in our area.

Help us keep the rain from the drain!

Source: http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=5

How much water will I collect?

The amount of rainwater that you collect depends on the area of roof that you are draining as well as the amount of rainfall. During the rain barrel season, WNY rainfall rarely exceeds one-half-an-inch per day so that's a good figure to use. (For local climate data, go to the National Weather Service website <http://www.weather.gov/climate/index.php?wfo=buf>)

You can calculate rain barrel requirements specifically for your roof with one of these tools:

Go to the Green Values Stormwater Toolkit website ([click here](#))

OR

Rain Barrel Equation: $V = A^2 \times R \times 0.90 \times 7.5 \text{ gals./ ft.}^3$ where:

R = Rainfall (feet)
0.90 = Losses to system (no units)
7.5 = Conversion factor (gallons per cubic foot)

Example: one 60-gallon barrel would provide runoff storage from a rooftop area of approximately 215 square feet for a 0.5 inch (0.042 ft.) of rainfall.

$$60 \text{ gallons} = 215 \text{ ft.}^2 \times 0.042 \text{ ft.} \times 0.90 \times 7.5 \text{ gallons/ft.}^3$$

Source: <http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/iwt/Rainwater.asp>

How can I collect even more rainwater?

You can link your rain barrels together by connecting the overflow hose to another rain barrel. When the first barrel fills up, the rainwater will overflow into the second barrel and so on.



Source: www.garb.com

What happens if my rain barrel fills up?

If there is a heavy rain fall or if you do not frequently empty your barrel, your rain barrel may overflow. If this happens, be sure to direct your overflow hose away from your foundation.

What can I use my rainwater for?

The water from rain barrels can be used for watering gardens and landscaping (consider attaching a soaker hose for easy irrigation); washing cars, windows, and garden tools; filling fountains, ponds, and birdbaths.

Can I drink my rain barrel water?

No! Rain barrel water is untreated and not suitable for human or pet consumption.

Will the rain barrel breed mosquitoes that spread West Nile Virus?

RIVERKEEPER rain barrels are equipped with mosquito-preventing netting on the top of the barrel to prevent mosquitoes from entering the barrel and laying eggs. If you would like an extra precaution, you may reduce the chances of mosquitoes breeding by draining the barrel frequently or using a product like "mosquito dunks" that are available in nursery centers and hardware stores. Mosquito Dunks are a non-toxic bacterium that kills mosquito larvae. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>) Some gardeners say that adding a drop of cooking oil to the water may prevent mosquitoes from laying eggs in the water.

What do I have to do to maintain the rain barrel in winter months?

Right before the first big freeze, rain barrels should be removed and stored upside down, preferably indoors, and the gutter should be reattached. Freezing may damage your rain barrel. Reinstall in the spring after the danger of freeze is past. (Sources: www.epa.gov/nps/ and www.rainfordane.org)

When and how do I clean my rain barrel?

If your barrel has been sitting empty or if a green scum forms in your rain barrel, it's time to clean out your rain barrel. If a green scum forms, it's most likely a harmless algae that grows when sunlight hits rainwater. To clean, add one or two capfuls of chlorine bleach into the partially full rain barrel. Let the water sit for a few days to allow the chlorine to evaporate from the water. Empty the barrel and scrub it with a soft bristle brush. Do not use vinegar to clean your rain barrel. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>)

Will the water smell?

To avoid odors, drain the water at least once a month and remove any leaves or organic debris in the barrel. If a smell does occur, add a capful of chlorine bleach to the water and let it sit for a day or two before using on plants. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>)

How do I install the rain barrel if I have gutters?

First, walk around your home and select the best location to install the rain barrel. Consider appearance, proximity to landscaping, and where the overflow rainwater will go. Next, measure the height to cut the downspout. Many gardeners choose to place concrete blocks under the downspout to increase the height of the rain barrel to increase gravity and improve flow. Be sure to measure the height of the blocks on level ground, the height of the barrel, and the height of the elbow joint that will direct the water into barrel. Using a hacksaw, cut the downspout to the proper height. Reconnect the elbow joint and place the barrel. Save the remaining piece of gutter as you will need to reconnect it during winter months. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>) Each rain barrel comes with thorough installation instructions.

How do I install the rain barrel if I have do not have guttering?

First, walk around your home and select the best location to install the rain barrel. Look for a place where two sections of roof meet that make a valley for rain to run off the roof. Consider the proximity to landscaping and where the overflow will go. Carefully place your barrel to capture the trickle of water that runs off the roof. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>)

Can I paint my rain barrel?

Yes! You can paint your rain barrel to match your home or use it as a creative expression of your personality! Use a paint that is made for plastics.



(Source: www.rogerwendell.com/)

I want to help reduce harmful runoff, but I don't like the look of rain barrels. What should I do? Some homeowners have used shrubs or fencing to screen the sight of the barrels. (Source: www.rainfordane.org)

What if my rain barrel springs a leak?

If your rain barrel isn't holding water, fill the barrel with water and see where it stops draining. Look along the water line to see the place of leak. Caulk the leak with aquarium caulk that is available at hardware and pet stores. (Source: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rbfaq.htm>)

How much does a full barrel weigh?

One gallon of freshwater weighs about 8.36 pounds. With a 60-gallon capacity plus the weight of the barrel, RIVERKEEPER rain barrels will weigh about 522 pounds.

What size is the RIVERKEEPER Rain Barrel? What colors do they come in?

RIVERKEEPER rain barrels have the capacity to hold 60 gallons of rainwater, stand 39" tall by 24" wide, and weigh approximately 20 lbs. empty. Colors are available in Earth Brown, Forest Green, and Nantucket Gray.

What do I get with my purchase?

Your rain barrel comes complete with installation instructions, overflow fitting, drain plug, screw on cover with a mosquito-preventing screen, and a threaded spigot positioned 14" from ground level.

How much are they and do you have group discounts?

\$99.95 + tax each and for purchases of 10 barrels or more, RIVERKEEPER will give a 10% group discount.

What is Special Membership Offer about? With the purchase of a rain barrel, you can join the Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER organization for only \$10! Members will receive electronic email updates, e-newsletters, discounts on merchandise, and a free RVRKPR decal.

How can I pay for my rain barrel?

RIVERKEEPER accepts payments by checks made payable to Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER, cash for in-person purchases, and credit card payments of American Express, Visa, or Master Card.

[To order, click here!](#)

When and where do I pick up my rain barrel?

Rain barrels will be available for pick up on May 23, 2009 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER Office located at 1250 Niagara Street, Buffalo, NY 14213. After two weeks if you have not picked up your barrel, it will be restocked in inventory.

What is the return policy? All sales are final.

Who do I call if I have further questions? If you have any further questions, please contact Kerri Bentkowski at (716) 852-7483 or email kbentkowski@bnriverkeeper.org.



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