

Rain Barrel *Maintenance*



What is a rain barrel?

A rain barrel collects stormwater from your roof downspouts. This water should be used only for non-potable purposes. Rain barrels come in a variety of sizes, but a 55-gallon container is the most common. Rain barrels can be added to any building with gutters and downspouts, but are most often used on single-family homes and townhomes.

A rain barrel needs regular maintenance, particularly:

- **Draining water before every storm**
- **Removing leaves and debris**

Maintenance you can perform:

As needed:

- ✓ Check the entire system to ensure the barrel is functioning properly.
- ✓ Regularly use water collected in your rain barrel between rain events to make sure there is room to collect stormwater during the next storm.
- ✓ Place gutter guards and/or screens on top of roof downspouts and on top of the barrel to keep leaves and debris from entering the rain barrel.
- ✓ Remove leaves and other debris from the screen at the top of the barrel, the overflow pipe, and the roof gutter.

Seasonally:

- ✓ Disconnect the rain barrel during the winter to avoid damage. Disconnect it from the downspouts, empty the barrel, wash it out, and store it upside down in a protected location.
- ✓ Open the rain barrel spigot if you expect to be away for an extended period of time; make sure it will drain away from your foundation.
- ✓ Clean the barrel using a non-toxic substance to remove residue or algae.
- ✓ Clean out downspouts and roof gutters for the most effective mosquito control. However, if you find mosquitoes in your rain barrel, you may use a mosquito-control product such as Mosquito Dunk (follow manufacturers' instructions).

Avoid:

- ✗ Don't leave water in your rain barrel for long periods of time.
- ✗ Don't drink the water in your rain barrel or use the water inside your home or for your pets.
- ✗ Don't let children play in or around a rain barrel.
- ✗ Don't spray the water directly on vegetables or leaves, as the stormwater may contain bacteria.
- ✗ Don't let the barrel foundation become unlevel or unstable. A full 55-gallon barrel weighs 450 pounds and can tip over on an unstable surface.
- ✗ Don't forget to reconnect your rain barrel every year after the threat of frost has passed.



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Why is it important to maintain your rain barrel?

An unmaintained rain barrel may:

- Overflow and cause erosion near the foundation
- Become clogged and block stormwater from entering the rain barrel
- Become a breeding place for insects
- Cause damage in the winter if not disconnected

By maintaining your rain barrel, you are doing your part to protect your local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

Recommended maintenance checklist

Seasonal Preparation

April and November

Leaf and Debris Removal

April through November

Water Drainage

April through November

Monitoring

April through November



Rain barrels elevated on blocks with a soaker hose for easier drainage



Decorative rain barrels with “planter tops”

Problem solving . . .

Overflowing

POSSIBLE CAUSE: Rain barrel was full before rain event or is too small for roof area.

SOLUTION: Empty the rain barrel between storm events. Connect a soaker hose to the outlet so the water can release slowly to your garden or yard area. Install additional barrels if more than one is needed for your roof area.

Cracks or damage

POSSIBLE CAUSE: The rain barrel contained water and temperatures dropped below freezing.

SOLUTION: Make sure you empty your rain barrel prior to winter. Repair damage as needed.

Unstable

POSSIBLE CAUSE: Foundation has shifted.

SOLUTION: Level the foundation and barrel.

You can prolong the life of your rain barrel and save money on maintenance costs by regularly inspecting and maintaining the rain barrel to ensure it is functioning properly.

If you have questions or need more information, please visit cbf.org.