



Rain barrels in the home landscape

Oklahomans are more than accustomed to long stretches of time with no rain. And, on occasion, the state experiences just the opposite, like it did in the late spring of 2019 with flooding rains. But for the most part, rain is a highly welcomed weather event in Oklahoma.

Instead of allowing rainwater to run off pavement and overwhelm storm drains, rainwater harvesting can allow this water to be used as valuable resource in the landscape. Some states in the United States don't allow rainwater harvesting, but in Oklahoma, rainwater harvesting is allowed and encouraged in many communities.

Harvesting rainwater is a great way to conserve water in the landscape. Rainwater also is beneficial to the vegetative matter in the landscape. In addition, it's not just the landscape that will benefit. Collecting rainwater in rain barrels helps reduce the amount of water entering stormwater drains, thus reducing the amount of water released into streams that can cause erosion and pollution. Installing a rain barrel can reduce the amount of flooding in a backyard or basement. Harvested rainwater can serve as an irrigation source for woody plants, herbaceous plants and lawns, allowing homeowners to reduce the amount of municipal water applied to the landscape, which saves money on water bills. And lastly, harvesting rainwater contributes to overall conservation of local water supplies.

Rain barrels for the home landscape typically range between 50 to 100 gallons in size and are available at local nurseries, garden centers and home improvement stores. Depending on features and aesthetics, the prices ranges from \$60 to \$100 or more. Homeowners also can make a rain barrel from a recycled feed container, along with a rain barrel diverter and parts kit for about \$30.

Rain barrels are typically placed, or connected, under the downspout, off of the home gutter system. Rainwater enters through an inlet covered with a screen to prevent mosquitoes, leaves, and other debris from entering the rain barrel. The outlet at the bottom of the rain barrel is a spigot or hose bib. An overflow outlet at the top of the rain barrel is necessary to divert excess water and a first flush diverter should be installed to avoid contaminants from entering the rain barrel. Install the rain barrel on a flat, level surface, elevated with concrete blocks, wood stands or bricks. The elevation increases the pressure, allowing efficient access to the water for use.

A gallon of water weighs about 8.5 lbs., and a 55-gallon rain barrel can weigh over 450 lbs. when full, so a stable and secure surface is important. Rainwater is not recommended for human consumption.

Be sure to clean out the rain barrel at least once a year using a mixture of one-eighth cup of chlorine bleach mixed with 5 gallons of water. This will help prevent algal growth.

Oklahoma State University Extension has more information on [rainwater harvesting](#), as well as [water conservation](#).

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