

## Rain Barrels

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After toting water buckets and unwinding and winding up more than 100 feet of hose every time I watered the plants, I noticed we didn't have a convenient hose bib on the back side of the house. My wife noticed this also, and didn't hesitate to let me know.

I also noticed that I got soaked whenever I tried to go through the back door during a rain, because of the curtain of water streaming off the roof. After the wife brought this to my attention (repeatedly), I realized the time had come to put up gutters. I didn't know it yet, but I was about to kill two birds with one stone.

The barrel I used to make my rain collector is a 60-gallon white oak whiskey keg that I bought from a roadside stand somewhere along Highway 64. Unfortunately, someone drained the whiskey out before I got to it. I paid about \$60 for it, and threw it in back of my truck with every intention of sawing it in half to make two planters for the driveway.

That weekend, I discovered a genuine imported cast-iron hand pump at the hardware store for about \$40. Knowing that the gutter-guy was coming to install a run of 5" gutter along the back of the house, I had an epiphany (nothing like a seizure) about rigging up the barrel and hand pump to harvest rain water.

A square hole was cut in the top of the oak barrel to allow the downspout to enter, and the hand pump was plumbed, and installed. The gutter-guys did a great job of plumbing in the downspout. The pump works to quickly fill the bucket, and a spigot is also mounted near the bottom if you don't want the exercise, or need a little water to prime the pump. An overflow pipe is tapped near the top of the barrel, which drains the water to a downspout deflector in case of a big rain. The barrel is set on pavers to keep it off the ground and hold it rock steady, and the space between the downspout and the hole in the barrel is screened to keep out bugs.

Our first spring rainfall tested the system. The barrel quickly filled to capacity and the overflow pipe got tested. The oak barrel leaked a bit at first, but the wood soon swelled up and sealed all the leaks. Everything seemed to work alright.

Harvesting and using rainwater is an old idea, and is still done at places on the Outer Banks by collecting rain into cisterns as a source of drinking water. But be warned: Water collected in rain barrels is not potable. The soft water is good for plants, but not people or animals, because of bacterial and viral concerns. Children and barrels don't go together, either. The top of any rain barrel should be covered to keep kids from falling in. During the winter, the barrel must be drained before freezing conditions to keep expanding ice from cracking the barrel. During the warm months, openings in the

barrel must be covered with screen to keep mosquitoes out. I have heard of people adding goldfish to rain barrels to eat mosquito larvae. Don't know if this is true.

How much water can this thing collect? The downspout for the rain barrel has a catchment area about one-third the size of the roof, or an area about 20 feet by 30 feet (600 feet<sup>2</sup>). In our part of the state, we get about 48 inches (4 feet) of rain annually, so the rain barrel could potentially collect 2,400 feet<sup>3</sup> per year (4 feet x 600 feet<sup>2</sup>). Each gallon of water contains about 7.48 gallons. This amounts to almost 18,000 gallons per year!

If you have any water-saving ideas or projects, mail them to Pipeline for publication! If you happen across any full whiskey barrels, give me a call!



