

Rain Barrels

What are rain barrels?

Rain barrels are a simple way to collect and store rainwater, typically from rooftops. This collected rainwater can be used to water gardens or house plants and fill bird baths. Rain barrels are an efficient, low-cost way for homeowners to conserve water. Common sizes for residential use are 55 gallons and 90 gallons.



What are the benefits of rain barrels?

Rain barrels can be used to offset household water usage and reduce water bills. Collecting rainwater where it falls also reduces the risks of running off driveways and lawns, where it picks up pollutants like motor oil and pesticides as it drains to local streams, rivers, and Puget Sound waterways.



Helpful Resources

“Conserve Water with a Rain Barrel” - HGTV guide

<http://www.hgtv.com/gardening/conservewater-with-a-rain-barrellindex.html>

HarvestH2O: The Online Rainwater Harvesting Community

<http://harvesth2o.com/index.shtml>

“How to Create a Rain Barrel” - DIY Network guide

<http://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/how-to-create-a-rain-barrellindex.html>

Rainwater Collection for the Mechanically Challenged



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Rain barrels are one method of low impact development (LID) used to effectively manage stormwater runoff.

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Planning and Caring for Your Rain Barrel

Observe your Site

Walk around your property to identify the site's drainage conditions and where the rainwater flowing off the roof goes. It may be helpful to sketch a site plan and mark the location of downspouts and roof lines (see sample sketch, right). Estimate the square footage of the roof areas and map where those areas drain. Then, install the rain barrel based on where you will use the water in your garden.

Locate

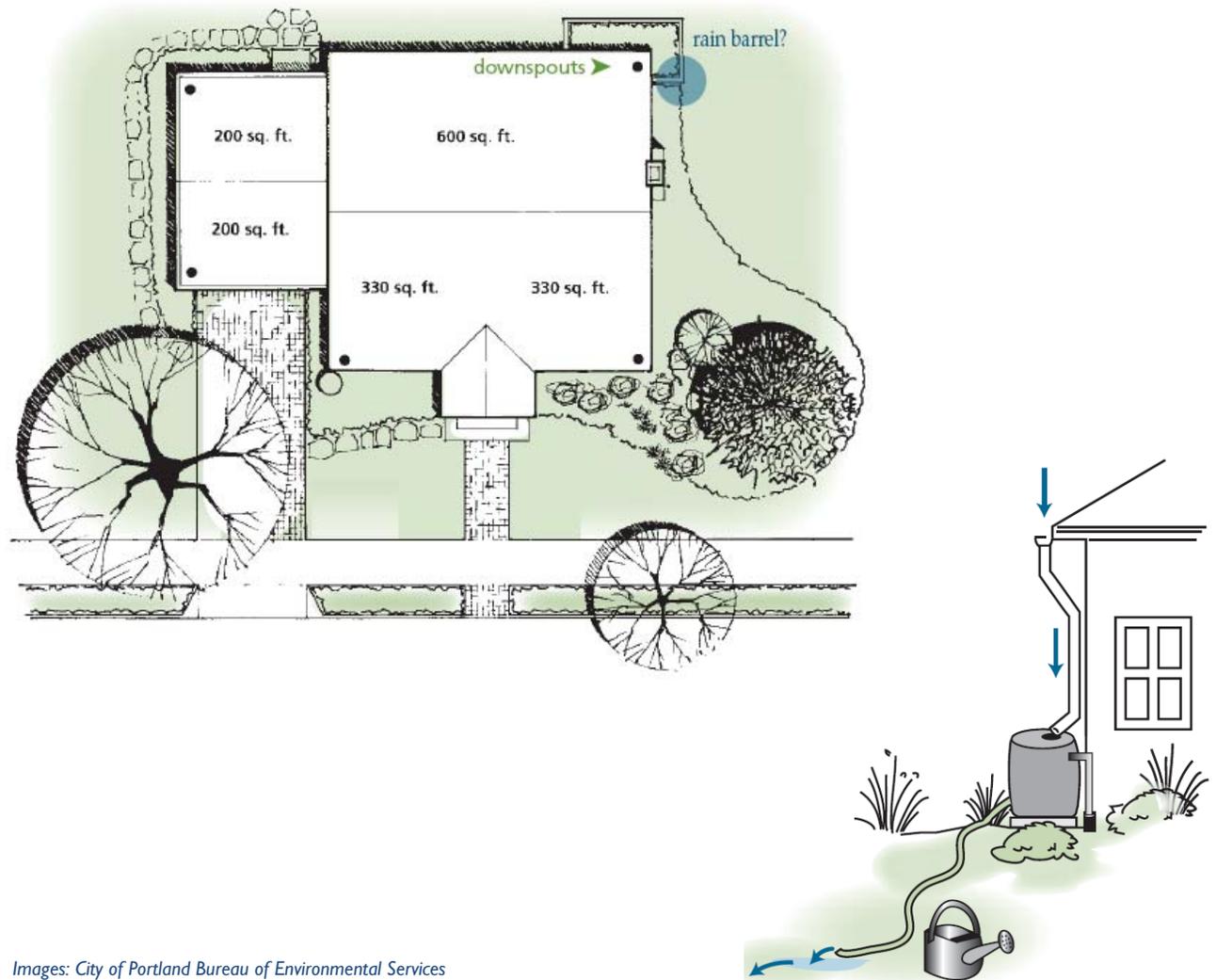
A rain barrel should be located at the base of a downspout. Be sure to select a location that allows overflow into the garden or landscape (see diagram, lower right).

Installation

Install the rain barrel on the ground next to the building. Secure it on a firm, level surface. A full 55-gallon rain barrel weighs over 400 pounds, so an even surface is very important to prevent the risk of tipping it over. A lid and sturdy fine mesh should cover all openings to prevent mosquitoes and debris from getting inside.

Maintenance

Clean out the rain barrel and check for leaks at least once per year. Downspouts, rain barrel screening, and overflow should be cleaned annually to prevent clogging. Caulk any observed leaks or holes. Make sure all the parts are securely fastened together. Monitor the overflow to make sure it drains away from structures. Drain the barrel if freezing weather is anticipated to protect from expanding and cracking the barrel or its parts.



Images: City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services

Where can you buy a rain barrel?

Many garden centers, hardware stores, and garden supply catalogs sell fully assembled rain barrels. You'll find a wide variety of styles and colors to suit your home's landscape. There are numerous online and print guides for building your own rain barrel too. Check out the list of helpful resources on the other side of this brochure to get started. Be sure to choose a barrel that is a structurally sound, food grade container made to hold liquid. Containers such as trash cans are not designed to withstand the pressure and weight of water.