

FROM: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/resources/rainbarl.htm#get>

## What are rain barrels?

Rain barrels are containers used to collect rain water from the roof of a building via the gutter and downspout. The downspout is cut to a height that permits the rain water to flow into a barrel placed beneath it. The barrel should have a spigot to which a hose may be attached, and an overflow hose to direct rain water away from the foundation if rain continues after the barrel is full. Rain barrels are often made from 55-gallon food-grade plastic barrels, although they can also be made of wood. The collected water can be used to water gardens or lawns, wash cars, fill swimming pools or do other household chores.

### Why use rain barrels?

**Conserve water and reduce stormwater runoff:** In the summer months, outdoor tasks such as watering lawns and gardens typically make up about 40% of household water use. With seasonal droughts, restrictions and bans on lawn watering, and the increasing cost of water, it makes sense to use rain water instead of municipal water for outdoor uses. Unless it is collected, rain water runs off impervious surfaces, such as roofs and pavement, gathering pollutants which often end up in local streams, rivers, pond, lakes and marine waters. Keeping and using rain water on your property helps reduce pollution, erosion and improves local watershed health.

**Water quantity:** Just 1/4 inch of rainfall on a typical roof will fill a rain barrel. A modest amount of rainfall can supply much or all of your outdoor watering needs - a full rain barrel will water a 200 square foot garden. A good rule of thumb is that 1 inch of rain on a 1000 sq ft roof yields 623 gallons of water. You can calculate the yield of your roof by multiplying the square footage of your roof by 623 and dividing by 1000.

**Water quality:** Rain water is "soft," or free from minerals and chemicals such as chlorine, fluoride, and calcium that are often present in municipal water. Rain water is considered ideal for watering plants or washing cars and windows.

### How do I install a rain barrel?

1. Purchase or make a rain barrel.
2. Select location under a downspout.
3. Determine height of barrel.
4. Build a platform to desired height - Elevating a rain barrel a foot or so above ground level increases the water pressure, which comes solely from gravity (unless you install a pump). A full rain barrel typically weighs over 400 lbs, so the platform must be made of sturdy materials such as cinder blocks, bricks, or similar materials. The platform must be flat, level and large enough to support the entire base of the barrel for good stability.
5. Place rain barrel on platform.
6. Cut downspout to fit opening - You should connect the house downspout, which you will have to cut with a hacksaw to accommodate the barrel, directly to the lid opening or via a flexible pipe. Or you may simply direct the downspout to the opening in your barrel. You may also wish to install a downspout diverter, which allows you to divert water back into your downspout during winter or when you do not wish to collect rainwater.
7. Attach a hose to the overflow fitting. Use a length of hose sufficient to drain excess rainfall away from your foundation into a garden area or into another rain barrel. Keep the overflow valve open at all times.

# How can I obtain a manufactured rain barrel?

Many Massachusetts towns and cities distribute rain barrels to residents through annual sales. Check with your municipality to see if there is a rain barrel sale planned and for details on how to participate. Or check the websites of the following vendors on state contract for information on sales planned in Massachusetts communities and how to participate. If no barrels are available in your community, try a neighboring community or consider purchasing a barrel directly from the vendor.



New England Rain Barrel, [www.nerainbarrel.com](http://www.nerainbarrel.com) (click "shop online" link)



Sky Juice New England, [www.skyjuice.us](http://www.skyjuice.us) (click "programs" link)



The Great American Rain Barrel Company, [www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com](http://www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com)



System Rain Barrel, Norseman Plastics, [www.norsemanplastics.com](http://www.norsemanplastics.com)

You can also check the following Massachusetts businesses that make rain barrels, or search for a rain barrel on-line:

- Boston Building Materials Coop, 100 Terrace St, Boston, MA, 617-442-2262, [www.bbmc.com](http://www.bbmc.com) (click on the "green products" link).
- Aaron's Rain Barrels, 86 Watertower Plaza #174, Leominster, MA, 978-790-1816, [www.farmersmarketonline.com/rain-barrels2.htm](http://www.farmersmarketonline.com/rain-barrels2.htm)
- F & M Tools and Plastics, 62 Lakeview St., Leominster, MA, 978-840-1897, [www.smartwareproducts.com](http://www.smartwareproducts.com).