

# Rain Barrels: A How-To Guide to a Healthy Yard



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

College of Agriculture  
and Bioresources

[AGBIO.USASK.CA](http://AGBIO.USASK.CA)



*City of*  
**Saskatoon**

## Rain Barrels

Rain barrels collect rainwater, provide a free source of water for your yard, and reduce the amount of storm water runoff that enters the South Saskatchewan River.

**During an average year in Saskatoon, a 1000 square foot roof will capture enough rain water to fill a 55-gallon rain barrel 110-125 times during the gardening season!**

## Benefits of Using Naturally Available Water

- Your plants and soil will be healthier if you use untreated water (rain water).
- You will reduce your water bill costs.
- Using rain water reduces your need for treated water, which puts less pressure on the water treatment plant and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- Washing your car with rainwater doesn't leave soft water spots behind!

And remember, use only the amount of water you need to prevent water wastage and unnecessary run off into the storm drains.

## Choosing a Rain Barrel

Regardless of size, colour, and material, a barrel should be sealed and equipped with

- an overflow mechanism to redirect water to plants or another barrel once full (ensure the overflow discharges water at least 6 feet away from any building foundation),
- a **drain (tap/spigot)** near the bottom to attach to a garden hose, drip irrigation system, or to fill a watering can, and
- a **screen** to cover the lid and overflow mechanism. This keeps debris from entering the barrel and prevents mosquitoes from laying eggs in standing water.



## Installation Tips

- Place the rain barrel on a stable, secure surface, approximately 10 cm from your house or garage.
- Elevate the rain barrel so gravity will help move water through a hose and allow enough space to fit a watering can. A 2% downward slope (minimum) from your barrel's tap to your hose nozzle will ensure water will flow easily. The larger the change in elevation, the more quickly water will flow.
- Redirect a downspout from your rain gutter to the top of your rain barrel. When it rains, water from your eaves will flow into your barrel.
- You can easily personalize or disguise your rain barrel with plastic-friendly paints or lattice screening.

## Safety Considerations

- Water from your rain barrel is not safe to drink!
- Ensure your barrel has a secure lid to prevent any accidents with pets or small children.
- Your rain barrel will be extremely heavy when full. Do not attempt to move it when it contains water.



## ■ Mosquito Control

There are many ways to deal with mosquitoes. Your screen should prevent mosquitoes from breeding so ensure it is intact. If you do have a problem, the simplest solution is to empty your barrel. This will kill the larvae.

- Mosquito dunks can also be added to your rain barrel. This organic control method utilizes bacteria that kills mosquito larvae but is harmless to people, pets, and plants.
- Adding a couple of tablespoons of food grade (cooking) oil to your rain barrel will leave a slight film on top of the water that will prohibit mosquitoes from nesting.

## ■ Rain Barrel Maintenance

Keep the barrel free of debris and rinse as needed to remove any algae growth.

## How Else Can I Reduce My Water Use?

- **Mulch** is the single best way to manage your garden ecosystem. Not only does it reduce your need for watering and lower evaporation, but it also keeps down weeds and protects your plants from temperature fluctuations. To learn more, view our *Mulch and More: How-To Guide*.
- **Plant native and drought-tolerant plants** that require less water. To learn more, view our *Low-Water Gardening: A How-To Guide*.
- If your lawn is established, water it deeply, but **no more than once a week**. To learn more, view our *Lawns: A How-To Guide*.
- See the City of Saskatoon's Be Water Wise tips on [saskatoon.ca/bewaterwise](http://saskatoon.ca/bewaterwise)





## When Cold Weather Arrives

- **Completely drain** the rain barrel of water, ideally onto your trees or shrubs, as this will help their roots overwinter.
- **Remove taps and overflow mechanism** if they are not permanently affixed.
- **Rinse** out rain barrel.
- **Store barrel** upside down or place in a protected area.

The City of Saskatoon offers a rebate on your rain barrel and compost bin purchases.

The rebate form is available online at:

[www.saskwastereduction.ca/rebate-form](http://www.saskwastereduction.ca/rebate-form)

### Gardening at the U of S

For gardening classes for the beginner through to certification, go to [gardening.usask.ca](http://gardening.usask.ca). Take a class, join a free horticultural tour, or enrol in our Gardening 101 series to walk you through your first year.

### City of Saskatoon

Having a healthy yard and garden benefits you and your community. For tips on water conservation, backyard composting, pesticide reduction, and more, visit [saskatoon.ca/healthyyards](http://saskatoon.ca/healthyyards).

### Questions?

Get free, local gardening advice from the University of Saskatchewan's Gardenline at [gardenline.usask.ca](http://gardenline.usask.ca) year round. During the growing season contact a horticulturist for personalized advice at [gardenline@usask.ca](mailto:gardenline@usask.ca).

Community gardening can be an excellent option for every type of gardener, particularly those with limited garden space. To join an existing community garden, or to start one yourself, visit: [chep.org/en/programs/community-gardening](http://chep.org/en/programs/community-gardening).

Grow a Greener Saskatoon