

Harvesting Rainwater for the Frugal Gardener



HARVESTING RAINWATER
*for the Frugal
Gardener*

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Gardening requires quite a bit of water. For many gardeners

that means an increase in their water bill during the [hot summer](#) months. Statistics show that lawn and garden watering make up at least [40%](#) of our total household water use. Frugal gardeners, however, can take advantage of rainwater by bringing back an age-old, low-tech system of collecting water from roofs and gutter systems into rain barrels, or cisterns as they have been called. By harvesting rainwater, you can keep your little corner of the world green, decrease stormwater runoff, and cut costs all at the same time.

Harvesting rainwater

One inch of rain on a 1,000 square foot roof will produce 600 gallons of water. Capture just some of that chemical-free rain in a container of any kind and you'll be able to keep your veggie garden thriving and your flowers blooming all season, with no added expense. Your plants will thrive with the natural rainwater compared to water from municipal systems and the chemicals they typically add. Rainwater is a free source of soft water and also excellent for your houseplants.

Most rain barrels now come with the fittings for hooking up a hose, so getting harvesting rainwater is as simple as locating a barrel under a gutter and screwing in your hose. If you have a very small garden plot, or only use small containers, you can opt for a simpler system. Locate a barrel under a downspout and just dip your watering can in when you are planning to water your plants and containers. Each time it rains, you can store water up for the dry days or days you can't water due to summer rationing schedules.

Due to the amount of water coming off a roof, it is important to have a plan for overflow. It's important to have a valve to switch tanks. You can also go low tech and manually move the downspout away from the already full barrel to keep from having a mini Niagara Falls next to your buildings' foundation.

As with anything that holds water, be sure your system has a child-proof, secure lid to prevent accidents. You might also want to screen the opening to your container, not only keeping debris out of the water but discouraging mosquitoes from breeding.

Where to get a water barrel?

Here's a list of a few of the companies that carry water barrels and supplies to help you set up a water storage system. Remember, your system for harvesting rainwater can be as simple or as complex as you have time and money for. Just the savings from setting up one downspout and a barrel will make a difference. What frugal gardener doesn't want to tap into a free resource?

- [Clean Air Gardening](#)
- [NE Design](#)
- [Midwest Internet Sales](#)
- [Spruce Creek Rain Saver](#)
- [Garden Water Saver](#)

Check local regulations

Before purchasing anything, be sure to check with the water department where you live to see if they are sponsoring a [Rain Water Harvesting project](#). Many cities encourage the installation of rain barrels as a method of conservation. They may offer the barrels at a reduced price or give rebates if you purchase your barrel elsewhere. Some towns even offer workshops and supplies to build your own systems.

Rain barrels are one of the simplest, cheapest ways to conserve [water](#), allowing you to treat rainwater as a resource and not a waste product. Harvesting rainwater on your property can help make your garden a more environmentally friendly space.

Installing a Rain Barrel

Rain Water Harvesting

Why You Should Test Your Soil



Along with water and sunlight, soil is the lifeblood of a garden. Without healthy, nutrient-filled soil, plants simply won't thrive.

It's tempting to believe that spraying your garden with fertilizer will encourage lush growth. But if you're spraying without testing your soil, you may be in for trouble down the line.

Why should you test your [garden](#) soil? There are several important reasons to test your soil.

Too fertilizer is bad

If you fail to get your soil tested, you have no clue about its nutrient makeup. By adding fertilizer without knowing what nutrients are already there, you risk harming plants *and* the environment. When you add too much fertilizer, you upset the soil's delicate ecosystem.

If you toss on tons of [fertilizer](#) without checking if it's really necessary, you also risk wasting a lot of [money](#). Fertilizer is expensive! Don't bother adding any unless it's absolutely necessary. Getting a soil test might just save you money!

Too little fertilizer is also bad

If your plants miss out on nutrients, that's also bad news. But how can you help them out unless you know what they need? A soil test can provide you with essential information about which nutrients are lacking in your garden. If you know exactly what to add, you won't waste precious dollars buying the wrong kind of fertilizer.

Soil tests are informative

They not only explain the nutrient makeup of your soil, but they also tell you other valuable information. Many extension offices that provide soil testing services provide gardeners with important information regarding the composition of their soil, including the amount of organic matter present. If you're short on organic matter, you can add more to improve

the condition of your soil, which can increase its drainage and water retention properties.

A few soil testing tips

Soil testing is a bit more involved than just taking a vial of dirt and sending it off to a lab. Doing it right ensures you will receive accurate results. The more accurate the results, the less likely you are to waste money and time!

- Don't take any soil from areas that have recently been fertilized
- Take different soils samples from different spots in your garden
- Label each soil sample appropriately
- Let the soil samples air dry before mailing them

Here's a handy video on how to take soil samples for mail-in testing:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_U9Z3fy0Ig

4 Smart Garden Devices That Save Time and Money



Manual work in the garden is sometimes gratifying, but over time the grind becomes tedious. Thankfully, there are a host of smart gardening products out there that can help save you

time and money. Which smart garden devices are worth the investment?

Here are my top 4 smart gadget recommendations for gardeners seeking to save time and spend less money on their edible plots.

Instapark Outdoor Automatic Watering Timer

I recently purchased and installed an automatic watering timer to [water](#) my front yard flower patch. This section of my garden sits under my home's roof overhang so it rarely receives any natural water and my regular hose doesn't reach that far, so it's a pain to water manually. I got some cheap irrigation hoses and connected them to this digital timer (both the hoses and timer cost under \$50) and now this perma-dry spot gets watered on a regular basis. There's a neat option to skip watering days (in case of rain), which I make sure to do so as not to waste water. The whole set up was inexpensive and it saves me loads of time in the long run. Last year, I relied on rainwater to wet this area and I lost quite a few plants, which I had spent time and money starting from seed.

Flexi Hose Expandable Garden Hose

I don't quite know what I was doing before I had this kind of hose. Now, watering is such a breeze it barely feels like a chore. Lugging around a heavy, clunky hose that's hard to put away? That's far from ideal. I'd sometimes skip watering because I hated to untangle the easily kinked hose. A flexible, expandable hose has its own challenges—it's a fair bit more delicate than a heavy-duty hose—but it's always easy to carry throughout the garden and it's a delight to put away since it shrinks down to size once drained. Just be sure to store it away for the winter to prevent the casing from cracking. While this isn't technically a smart device, I think

the design is clever enough to qualify. It has saved me time and money because it makes watering a lot easier and I haven't neglected my watering duties since getting this type of hose.

AcuRite Wireless Rain Gauge

When it comes to gardening, I rely on the weather forecast a lot. No matter how diligent I am in checking the weekly weather predictions, I can't accurately measure the amount of rain my garden gets without the help of a gadget. A plain rain gauge does the trick, but if you like smart technology, this nifty wireless device is a handy monitoring tool. It's a self-emptying collector that's useful for checking how much rainwater your garden is getting. It's also an excellent device for people in flood-prone areas. And it costs under \$50!

Click and Grow Indoor Smart Garden

This intelligent garden system is on the higher end of the price scale, but it's well worth the investment. I've grown so many herbs in this little automated garden that I never buy them at the grocery store anymore. The hydroponic unit makes it possible to grow [greens](#), herbs, and other plants indoors all year round. All you need to do is add water and harvest away!