

What's Happening to the Water Cycle?

As we develop our land and increase the amount of paved surfaces and buildings (sometimes called “impervious surfaces”), the water cycle is changed.

With more impervious surfaces, less rainfall and snowmelt sinks into the ground and more water flows rapidly over the land into our lakes, rivers and streams. Stormwater runoff can lead to increased flooding, erosion and pollution and decreased groundwater recharge during dry periods.

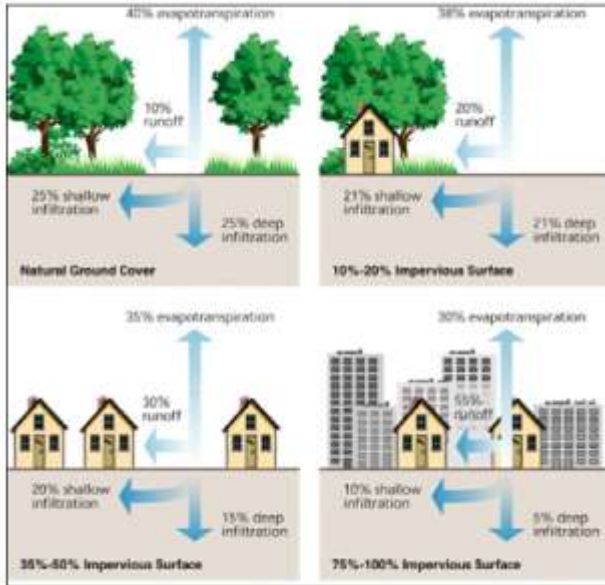


Photo: FISRWG

As impervious surfaces increase, the problems associated with stormwater quality also increase. Stormwater can contain pollutants such as sediment, nutrients, bacteria and chemicals that can threaten aquatic health, and contribute to the loss of water dependent recreational activities. Unmanaged stormwater is recognized nationally as the leading cause of water pollution today.

Conventional methods of land development collect and convey stormwater quickly into a series of drains and pipes that flow directly into the closest waterbody with little or no water quality treatment.

How Can We Help?

Install a Rain Barrel to

Recycle Rain Water and Save Money

One of the easiest and most cost effective methods for conserving water and improving water quality is to ...
INSTALL A RAIN BARREL.

Collecting rainwater for use during dry months in rain barrels or other depositories is an ancient and traditional practice. Historical records show that rainwater was collected in simple clay containers as far back as 2,000 years ago in Thailand, and throughout other areas of the world after that.

With the rising price of municipal water and drought restrictions now facing much of the United States during the summer months, more and more homeowners in our own modern society are turning to the harvesting of rainwater to save money and protect this precious natural resource.

Rain barrels collect water from rooftops and store it for later use. The water can then be reused for a variety of water needs. Using a rain barrel at your home can:

- ◆ Capture a valuable resource that would otherwise be lost to storm drains
- ◆ Divert stormwater back to the landscape
- ◆ Conserve tap water and energy use
- ◆ Lower your water and utility bills
- ◆ Installing a rain barrel is an easy way to make your home environmentally friendly!

REMEMBER . . .

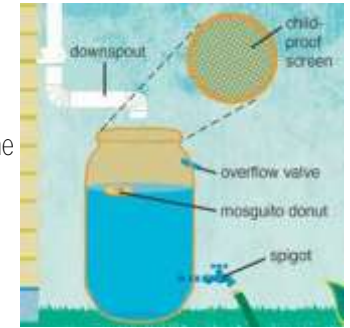
Before beginning any project, check homeowner association covenants, as well as local and county ordinances.

Do not work in a drainage, utility, or other easement without the proper permits.

What is a Rain Barrel?

A rain barrel is a specially designed container that holds about 40-75 gallons of water. Rain barrels come in a variety of different styles, colors, and materials ranging from wooden barrels to recycled plastics.

Designs include a screen, closed top, or even using goldfish to manage debris and mosquitoes that might enter your rain barrel.



Anatomy of a typical Rain Barrel.
Image: thisoldhouse.com

It Pays to Conserve Water!

Save Water and Energy— **Most people don't realize that conserving water can also save energy.** Over 9% of the electricity in the United States is used to pump, treat and heat water! By collecting water in rain barrels, you can personally make a difference in reducing the energy use that contributes to excess greenhouse gases. Rain water harvesting can help to reduce water related energy use as well as save you money.

Save Money – Lawn and garden watering make up nearly 40% of total household water use during the summer. A rain barrel collects water and stores it for when you need it most - during periods of drought - to water plants, wash your car, or top a swimming pool. It provides an ample supply of free “soft water” to homeowners, containing no chlorine, lime or calcium. This makes it ideal for gardens, flower pots, and car and window washing. Just ¼ of an inch of rainfall can yield up to 150 gallons of water from a 1000 square foot rooftop – enough to fill three rain barrels! If you use public water, you can save money on your water bill. If you have your own well, a few rain barrels could provide savings on your energy bills.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do rain barrels provide mosquito habitat?

A: Most rain barrels are fully enclosed or have a screen and caulking around the downspout to prevent mosquitoes and other debris from entering the barrel. Some people even use goldfish in their rain barrels to address this concern. If the rain barrel is properly installed and maintained, mosquitoes do not have the opportunity to breed.

Q: How much does a rain barrel cost?

A: An average rain barrel costs between \$55 and \$120. Local conservation agencies and garden clubs may offer rain barrels for sale at a discount. In fact, YOUR St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District sells rain barrels a few times throughout the year and you can find out more by calling us at 574.291.7444 ext. 3. You can save even more money by making your own rain barrel. The **“Want to Know More?”** section of this brochure includes a website with detailed instructions on how to construct a rain barrel.

Q: How do I maintain my rain barrel?

A: To keep your rain barrel in good condition, use the water in your rain barrel frequently so that storage is available for the next rain event. Before winter, drain the barrel, clean it with a non-toxic cleaning solution, and check all of the connections for repairs. Store the empty rain barrel upside down to keep it from freezing until you are ready to use it again in the spring. If properly maintained, the average life span of a rain barrel is 20 years – a great investment!

Q: How can I use the water in my rain barrel?

A: You can use the water to irrigate your lawn, water indoor/outdoor plants, fill outdoor fountains, wash your car, or clean household windows. The water in the rain barrel can collect pollutants from your roof and should not be used for drinking water or for bathing. Further details on rainwater harvesting can be found in the **“Want to Know More?”** section of this brochure.

Want to Know More?

Indiana’s Pathway to Water Quality website (use the shortcut at <http://tinyurl.com/pathwayrainbarrels>) includes so many great links to explore, including:

- ◆ A Pathway to Water Quality Rain Barrel Guide
- ◆ University of Wisconsin Extension’s publication, “A Household Way to Improve Water Quality in Your Community,” which is a basic introduction on how rain gardens help protect water quality, and general step-by-step instructions on how to build a rain garden in your yard.
- ◆ Several links that show you how to make your own rain barrel
- ◆ Several sources to purchase rain barrels and rain barrel accessories online, including Rain Barrels and More, RainReserve, CleanAirGardening.com, and GreenCulture

YOUR St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) has some great information about Rain Barrels and other “Backyard Conservation” practices you can learn about on our website (www.stjosephswcd.org).

◆ Be sure to check out the “Backyard Conservation” page of our website by visiting this shortcut:

www.tinyurl.com/swcd-my-yard or you can

Google “st joseph county swcd rain barrel”

(without the quotation marks)

**St. Joseph County
Soil & Water
Conservation District**



RECYCLING RAIN WATER



*Become a “RAIN FARMER”...
Rain barrels collect and store water
from rooftop runoff for you
to “harvest” for later use.*

How to
Save Money
and
Conserve
Water
with
Rain Barrels

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St. Joseph County Soil & Water
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