

# RAIN BARRELS

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is a rain barrel and why should I have one?**

A rain barrel is a container used to collect and store rainwater that would otherwise be lost to runoff and likely diverted to a storm drain. Collected water may then be used to water lawns and gardens. Rain barrels help with water conservation, protecting our watersheds, and provide a free source of water for natural gardening. Water collected is free of the additives that are in hose water. These additives can kill beneficial microbes that are in your soil leaving it less fertile. Plants love rain water.

- **I want a Rain Barrel - How do I get one?**

Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) holds rain barrel workshops (\$60/barrel system- 55 gallon barrel, 2' wide x 3' tall) throughout the County from March - September. Check the website for upcoming workshops [www.cuyahogaswcd.org](http://www.cuyahogaswcd.org). Rain Barrel systems can also be purchased at some garden centers but they are generally more expensive and don't always include the downspout diverter kit which attaches the rain barrel to your downspout.

- **Will my community allow me to have a rain barrel?**

Many communities have policies about rain barrels ranging from location, to number allowed per downspout, to permit fees, so call your city hall before installing a rain barrel. The system sold by CSWCD is a diversion system, meaning that the barrel is collecting water that is diverted from the downspout. Water is always going down the downspout, just some is being diverted to the barrel. There is no overflow. Disconnection of a downspout can be troublesome because you need an overflow and water can be directed where it should not go. Cities generally prefer diversion of rain water over disconnection of a downspout.

- **Ok, my barrel is hooked up. What do I do now?**

Wait for it to rain. Your roof size and the amount of rain that falls will determine how fast your rain barrel fills up. Generally, your barrel will be full after about a 1/2 inch or less of rain. It fills up quickly!

- **I want to paint my barrel, but I don't know what paint to use.**

Barrels can be painted and sometimes made to be beautiful art projects! Plain or detailed, rain barrels are easy to paint. Be sure to rough up the barrel with some sandpaper so the paint will stick. The more the better. There is paint that is meant to adhere to plastic but again, roughing up the barrel with sandpaper helps it adhere better. If you want to paint a design, rough up the barrel with sandpaper and prime the barrel with a primer that adheres to plastic. Then you can use any type of outdoor acrylic to paint your design. Sealing the barrel with a clear sealant is highly recommended to preserve your artwork. Storage in a garage or basement during the winter months will preserve your work even longer.

- **What do I do with my rain barrel in the winter?**

In the winter, be sure to empty out and store your rain barrel in a basement, garage, etc. (especially if you have painted it!). If you don't have a place to store it, you can leave it outside, just be sure to turn it upside down so it drains completely. If you use the diverter from one of our workshops (Garden Water Saver diverter), remove the hose and the diverter can stay in place and be plugged with the plug provided.

- **My barrel is leaking around the spigot or other places.**  
This shouldn't happen but if it does, you can use any type of water tight sealant around the leak to seal it up.
- **I want to connect a second (or third, etc.) barrel to my first one.**  
You can always attend another workshop hosted by the CSWCD to get more barrels. However, if you just want to buy a barrel and connect it yourself, you can go to Container Compliance and purchase the barrel for \$20-\$25. Their phone number is 216/961-0035 and they are located at 5151 Denison Ave. in Cleveland. Be sure your barrels are elevated at the same height. Connecting the barrels at the bottom is best because the barrels fill up together and drain together. That way you only need a spigot on one barrel.
- **I've heard I can get a discount on my Storm Water Utility fee from the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS).**  
Please check the NEORS website for information on this program.  
<http://www.neorsd.org/stormwaterprogram.php>
- **What do I do about algae in my barrel?**  
Algae will form in your barrel. There is no way around it. It is harmless to plants and your barrel. However, if there is a lot of it, it can clog the spigot. You can use a tablespoon or two of bleach in your rain barrel to mix with water to clean out some of the algae. The barrels we use are closed so you can't get in to scrub them but the bleach may help. You can also spray the inside of the barrel through one of the bungs using a garden hose. Painting your barrel a dark color can help deter algae build up too.
- **The hose from the diverter to the barrel is clogged, what happened?**  
Chances are you have some debris in the hose which can happen especially if you have a lot of small debris on your roof. Detach your hose and use a spray hose to flush out the debris.
- **There is debris in the diverter, what do I do?**  
Clean it out. The amount of debris that collects in your diverter depends on how many trees are around your downspout where the rain barrel is hooked up. Leaves, spinners, etc. can collect in there. Look every once and awhile and clean it out - that should prevent any clogs.

For more information about rain barrels and other events,  
contact us at 216/524-6580 or visit our website at  
[www.cuyahogaswcd.org](http://www.cuyahogaswcd.org)

