

How to maintain your RAIN BARREL

Montgomery County, Maryland

Department of Environmental Protection

Stormwater Facility Maintenance Program

What are rain barrels?

Rain barrels collect rainwater from your roof downspouts for non-potable reuse. Rain barrels come in a variety of sizes, but a 55-gallon container is the most common size. Rain barrels can be added to any building with gutters and downspouts, but are most common on single family homes and townhomes.

Rain barrels need regular maintenance, similar to other features of your property, particularly:
Draining Water Before Every Storm
Removing Leaves and Debris



Who is responsible for this maintenance?

As the property owner, YOU are responsible for all maintenance of your rain barrels.

Actions you can take

Do...

As needed

- ✓ Check the entire system (e.g., gutters, debris filter, overflow pipe, fittings, spigot, etc.) to ensure the barrel is functioning properly.
- ✓ Place gutter guards and/or screens on top of roof downspouts and on top of the barrel to prevent leaves and sediment from entering the rain barrel.
- ✓ Remove leaves and other debris from the screen at the top of the barrel, the overflow pipe, and the roof gutters.
- ✓ Regularly use water collected in your rain barrel between rain events to make sure there is room to collect rainwater during the next storm. Drain your rain barrel before the winter season.
- ✓ If your barrel has a filter screen, make sure it is intact without holes and securely fastened to keep out mosquitoes.

Seasonally

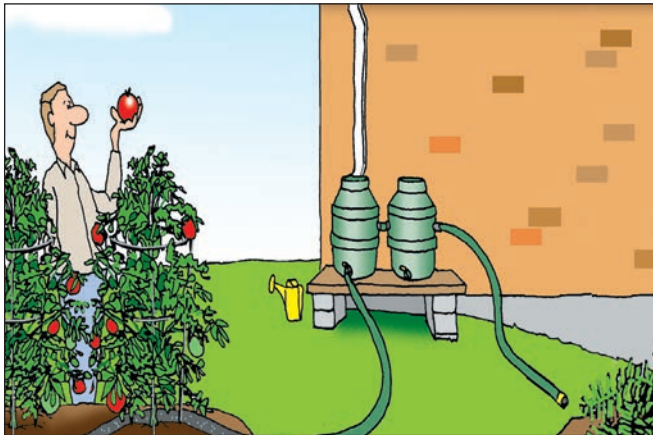
- ✓ Unless the rain barrel is made of a material specifically designed for freezing temperatures, disconnect it during the winter to avoid damage. Around Thanksgiving, disconnect the rain barrel from your downspouts, empty the barrel, wash out the barrel, and store it upside down in a protected location. Connect the barrel to your downspout around April Fool's Day.
- ✓ Open the rain barrel spigot if you expect to be away from your home for an extended period of time; make sure it will drain away from your foundation.
- ✓ Clean the barrel using a non-toxic substance such as vinegar to remove residue or algae.
- ✓ Clean out downspouts and roof gutters for the most effective mosquito control. However, if you find mosquitoes in your rain barrel, you may use dunks. A quarter dunk added monthly may be adequate for a 55-gallon rain barrel.

Don't...

- ✗ Don't leave water in your rain barrel for long periods of time.
- ✗ Don't drink the water in your rain barrel or use the water inside your home or for your pets. This water should only be used as non-potable water.
- ✗ Don't let kids play in or around rain barrels.
- ✗ Don't forget to reconnect your rain barrel every year after the winter frost season.
- ✗ Don't spray the water directly on vegetables or leaves, as it may contain bacteria from the roof.
- ✗ Don't let the barrel foundation become unlevel or unstable. A full 55-gallon barrel weighs 450 pounds and can tip over on an unstable surface.

Can I remove the practice?

No, you cannot remove any practices that were part of your building installation—these are permitted structures and DEP maintains a database of these facility locations. DEP may perform a maintenance inspection of your rain barrel if it is a permitted structure. Contact DEP to find out if you have a permitted structure or if you would like to discuss options for modifying your facility.



Rain barrels with soaker hoses

Why is it important to maintain your rain barrel?

An unmaintained rain barrel may:

- Overflow and cause erosion near the foundation
- Become clogged and not allow rainwater to pass into or out of the rain barrel
- Become a breeding place for insects or tip over
- Cause ice dams in the winter if not disconnected

By maintaining your rain barrel, you are doing your part to conserve water and protect your local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.



Rain barrels with “planter tops”

Troubleshooting

Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Rain barrel is overflowing	Rain barrel was full before rain event or is too small for roof area.	Empty the rain barrel between storm events. If more than one barrel is needed for your roof area, install additional barrels in series.
Cracks or damage	The rain barrel contained water and temperatures dropped below freezing.	Make sure you empty your rain barrel prior to winter. Repair damage as needed.
Forgetting to drain barrel before a storm	Rain events may occur frequently	Connect a soaker hose to the outlet to direct the slow release of water to your garden or yard area.
Rain barrel is leaning	Foundation has shifted	Level the foundation and barrel.

You can prolong the life of your rain barrel and save money on maintenance costs by regularly inspecting and maintaining the rain barrel to ensure it is functioning properly.

Recommended timeframes for typical maintenance

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Leaf and Debris Removal				✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	
Water Drainage				✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	
Monitoring				✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿	
Seasonal Preparation				✿							✿	

What if I need help or have additional questions?

DEP can answer your questions and provide additional guidance about maintaining your rain barrel. Please e-mail us at Askdep@montgomerycountymd.gov, call the Montgomery County Customer Service Center at 3-1-1, or visit <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/stormwater>.