"Conserve water, save money, and treat your plants right by installing a rain-collection barrel."

save *the* rain

It's free, it's easy to store, and it helps make flowers, grass, and gardens thrive. It's rainwater, and you can capture and store it in a rain barrel that's fast, easy, and inexpensive to build.

Every time it rains, water pours off your roof and out your downspouts. Some of it may end up feeding your yard, but most probably ends up in the storm sewer. Instead of letting that water flow away, why not save some and use it for watering flowers and plants around your house? You can with a rain barrel.

If you're wondering whether saving rainwater is worthwhile, consider this: Even a quarter-inch of rain can cause over 150 gallons of water to pour off an average-size roof. Save just a portion of that, and you'll have an ample supply of natural, untreated water that helps plants thrive. Plus, it's all free.

Rain Barrel Basics — Thankfully, capturing that water is easy. As you can see in the *Photo* at right, all you need is a container that sits below a downspout. Water pouring off the roof fills the container and sits at the ready for your yard and garden needs. Just connect a hose, and the water flows. The *Illustration* on page 56 shows more detail.

Of course, that flow is dependent on gravity. Water can't flow uphill, so that means you'll need to position the barrel above the level where you want to use the water.

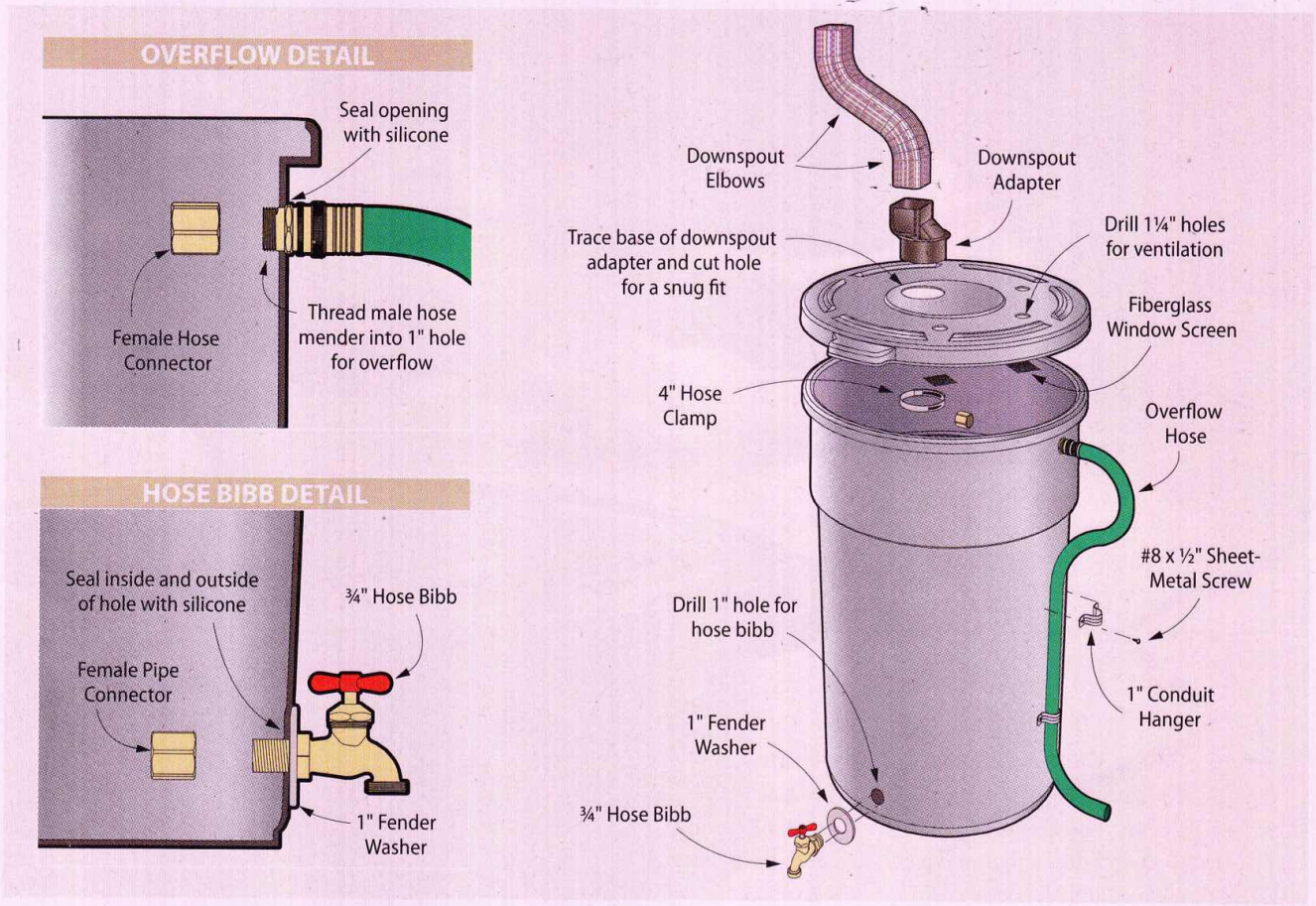
If your property slopes, try to locate the barrel on high ground. If that's not possible, place the barrel on a sturdy support, such as landscape blocks, to raise it. Even if you can't raise the barrel high enough to effectively connect a hose, you can simply use it to fill watering cans. Either way, you'll still get a lot of free water.

Build Your Own Barrel — Making a rain barrel is easy. The main thing you'll need is a container. We used a heavy-duty industrial trash can. But you can also use a "food-safe" barrel, which may be available from restaurant suppliers in your area, or even an old wine barrel. Add a few basic plumbing parts from the hardware store and a couple hours of work, and you'll be set.

We chose to use a trash can because they're readily available in home centers. Plus, a trash can has a removable lid that makes it easy to get into the barrel to clean it out.

Granted, a trash can might not be beautiful, but it can be placed inconspicuously or disguised with plants. If you really want an authentic wood barrel, you can buy "retired" wine barrels online. But be prepared to pay as much as $100 for a barrel, plus close to that much for shipping.

Now that you know the basics, you're ready to turn the page and see exactly how to build your own barrel.



Here's how to make the barrel

To get started building your rain barrel, the first thing you'll need to do is gather supplies. You can find everything you need at your nearest hardware store or home center.

The first item to find is the container that you'll turn into a barrel. We used an industrial plastic trash can. Don't try to save a few dollars by purchasing an inexpensive trash can. They're too flimsy and tend to deform when filled with water. We used a "Brute" 40-gallon can from Rubbermaid.


[1]

In addition to the container, you'll need a few items that you can find in the plumbing and garden supply aisles. You'll find the complete project supply list on the next page.

Once you have your supplies in hand, get your tools. All I needed was a drill, two spade bits (1" and 1¼"), a utility knife, and a pair of scissors. With those, you can make and install your barrel in just a couple of hours.

Add the Bibb — Drill a 1" hole near the bottom of the trash can to receive the hose bibb *(Fig. 1)*.

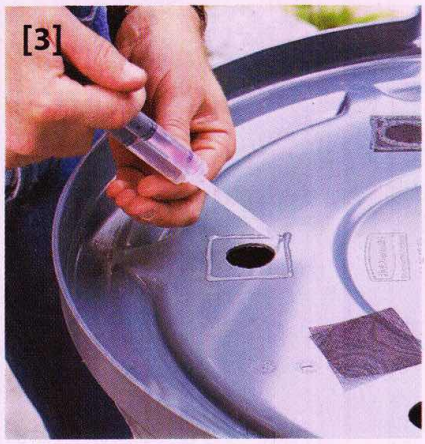
Now slip a fender washer over the hose bibb threads, put silicone around the hole, and slip the bibb in *(Fig. 2)*.

Then put silicone around the inside of the hole, and secure the bibb with a pipe connector. Use pliers to snug the connector down tightly.

Create an Overflow — Drill another 1" hole near the top of the barrel to create an overflow. Install a male hose mender in the hole, put silicone around the inside of the mender, and then thread on a hose connector.

"Building a rain barrel is downright easy. A drill, a pair of pliers, and a few basic tools are all it takes."

1] Drill a hole for the hose bibb about 1½" up from the bottom of the trash can.
2] Run beads of silicone sealant around the opening, and then slip in the hose bibb.
3] Use epoxy to hold the screens in place under the ventilation holes.
4] Press the screens into the epoxy before it sets up.
5] A hose clamp holds the downspout adapter in place but still allows it to be turned.



Add a section of garden hose, and secure it with a couple of conduit straps. Apply silicone around the screws to prevent leaks.

Let Air Out, Water In — Next, you'll need to modify the trash can lid to allow water to get in but also allow air to escape.

Start by drilling the ventilation holes with a 1¼" spade bit. Three or four holes will suffice. To prevent leaves, bugs, or debris from falling into the barrel, cover these holes with fiberglass window screen *(Figs. 3 and 4)*.

Now make an opening to allow the water in. I used a plastic downspout adapter that's meant to connect downspouts to drainpipes. Just trace around the adapter flange with a marker, and then cut the a hole using a utility knife. Press the adapter into the hole, and secure it with a 4" hose clamp *(Fig. 5)*.

Roll out the Rain Barrel — With the barrel complete, you just need to place it under a downspout. Raise the barrel, so the bibb is at least a few inches off the ground. If you plan to fill watering cans, or if you need to elevate the barrel to ensure good water flow, raise it higher. Just be sure to place it on sturdy supports, such as landscape blocks. When full, the barrel will be quite heavy.

All that's left now is to cut off the downspout and then add elbows or a flexible adapter to connect the downspout to the barrel.

— Written by David Stone, illustrated by Erich Lage

SUPPLY LIST:

- (1) hose bibb, male threads
- (1) pipe connector
- (1) male hose mender
- (1) female hose connector
- (1) 1" fender washer
- (1) plastic downspout adapter
- (1 sq. ft.) fiberglass window screen
- (2) 4" hose clamps
- (2) 1" conduit hangers
- (1) 4-ft. length of garden hose
- (2) downspout elbows
- 5-minute epoxy
- Silicone sealant
- Blocks to raise the barrel