

Harvesting Cloud Juice
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There is no argument with the fact that our winters are soggy, but conversely our summers can be relatively parched. With that in mind, consider the fact that 30-40% of summer water usage in a typical household is exhausted on gardens and turf. There is a way to counter this costly trend. In addition to using drought tolerant plants and reducing the square footage of thirsty lawns, take advantage of the season's rainfall and install rain barrels.

Harvesting rain water will save money and energy. It can also save thousands of gallons of expensive tap water as it reduces the demand on ground water resources and reduces runoff that flows into the gutters which becomes polluted on its way out to the Sound or other body of water. Think of rain harvesting as a savings account. One inch of rain falling on a 1000 square foot roof (metal roofs are more efficient) adds up to about 600 gallons of water.

Installing rain barrels is not rocket science. It is a simple process. Decide on a location (under which or how many downspouts). Gather materials. You will need a receptacle(s) of some sort: concrete cisterns, plastic or wooden barrels, even a series of 18" PVC pipe (10 feet of 18" PVC pipe holds 132 gallons of water and can be attached to the house and painted to blend in) will work. Spigots, flex pipe, a stable base for the receptacle (brick, concrete blocks or drainage rock) and an overflow pipe are also needed. Install (refer to online sites for more installation info).

Last minute tips: Keep a tight lid on the receptacle to deter critters from being tempted to take a swim, to prevent evaporation and to keep the sun out and algae at bay. Adding a screen to the gutter either at the roof line or before entering the container will keep debris out. Make certain that the overflow pipe is directing water to a safe place away from the house. Keep in mind, harvesting cloud juice now (a good winter project) will save precious resources later.

NOTE: Master Gardener 2012 Yard and Garden Lecture Series begins in January. Call 360-379-1172 for ticket information.