**Rain Barrels: History, Fact, Benefits, and Tips for Your Project**

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In some states, especially in the West, water laws stated that all precipitation belonged to existing water-rights owners, and that rain needs to flow to join its rightful water drainage.

Water in Colorado must be allotted according to the prior appropriation system. This is a common system in the West and is often referred to as "first in time, first in right". [see http://water.state.co.us/surfacewater/swrights/pages/priorapprop.aspx]

At one time, the collection of rainwater for beneficial use was recognized as a potential injury to senior water rights and was historically prohibited in Colorado.

However, under a 2016 Colorado law, House Bill 1005, residential homeowners are now able to use two rain barrels, with a combined capacity of 110 gallons, to capture precipitation from their rooftops. The collected precipitation is required to be used on the property where it is collected and may only be applied to outdoor purposes such as lawn irrigation and gardening.

So, here we are in 2022! Let's take advantage of this great opportunity.

Did you know rain barrels have community as well as household benefits? Besides contributing to your beautiful flowers and plants, here are some of the benefits of using a rain barrel as part of your eco-friendly gardening:

**1. Rainwater is better for your plants and soil.** Rainwater is highly oxygenated, free of the salts, inorganic ions, and fluoride compounds contained in tap water that accumulate in the soil over time and potentially harm plant roots. Use of rainwater in your garden dilutes this impact, making plants more drought-tolerant, healthy, and strong.

**2. You'll help to reduce runoff pollution.** When it rains, runoff can pick up soil, fertilizer, oil, pesticides and other contaminants and push them to other areas of the landscape. These pollutants can increase algae growth in lakes, alter the habitat for fish, and even make lakes and oceans dangerous for recreational activities. Your water collecting stops some of this damaging flow.

**3. You'll contribute to erosion prevention efforts.** Rain runoff is also an important issue in places where land erosion is a concern. Your rain catching activities will be especially helpful in these cases.

**4. You'll cut down on the amount of water that must undergo expensive and energy-intensive sewage treatments.** Capturing rainwater and putting it straight to use in your garden eliminates the need for this processing.

**5. Rainwater is the eco-friendly option to keep composts moist.** Adding tap water to your compost doesn't fit this sustainability practice; you'll want to use rainwater instead.

**6. You'll help control moisture levels around the foundations of your home.** Collecting rainwater before it hits ground levels will help to prevent flooding, damp, and mold.

**7. You can reduce your water bill.** Garden and lawn watering accounts for 40 percent of residential water use during the summer, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Thanks to a rain barrel's water catch, the typical gardener can save 1,300 gallons of water during the growing season.

**8. You'll be an inspiring example of environmental stewardship.** And we thank you for it!

**9.** Here are some important tips when planning your rain barrel project.

1. Make sure you have a reliable friend to help you with your rain barrel, like Maple the Beagle.
2. The collection container must have a lid. It may help to have something to help filter out leaves and debris from entering your barrel.
3. Make sure the barrel has an overflow pipe or hose to direct water away from the house once the barrel is full.
4. A spigot at the base of the barrel makes watering easier - especially to fill watering cans or buckets.
5. You can also attach a hose to the spigot to water nearby plants. Remember this is a passive system, so the pressure will depend on how high the barrel is above the ground...and how much water is inside.

Sources for more information:

State Rainwater Harvesting Laws and Legislation, http://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/rainwater-harvesting.aspx

CSU Fact Sheet 6-707, Rainwater Collection in Colorado, Extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas-natural- resources/rainwater-collection-colorado-6-707

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