

Collecting Rainwater

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People have been collecting water from rain since time began. There are documented water cisterns from over 2000 years ago. In Bermuda everyone has a cistern under their house to collect rainwater for drinking and household chores. It is estimated that a 1000 sq. ft. roof can deliver 22,000 gal. of water a year to a collection container. Wouldn't it be great to never have to pay the water department again to water your plants.

Collection containers can come in a variety of sizes, shapes and prices. You do not need to spend a lot of money to have a nice system. Commercially sold systems can set you back anywhere from \$50 for a simple container to thousands of dollars for very large systems. They all will pay for themselves in just a couple of years. Of course if you do it yourself you will be able to save a lot of money. August is a great example of why we like to collect rainwater for our gardens. Until the last week in August it did not rain at all. Everything including the clover in my yard was parched. Luckily this last spring I set up three large water collection stations. These are not huge only around three hundred gallons each. (see photo 1). This gave me almost 1000 gallons of free water to use. I have been using these all summer long and until the last week in August it had rained enough that they did not go dry.



Photo 1

This is a great way to make gardening more affordable since you do not have to pay a water or sewer fee. There is a little expense to setting up a system, but if you can use Craigs list or other sources, you can find the parts at a discount. The containers can be anything that holds water, a cattle tank and industrial carboys work great.



Photo 2

Plastic 50 gal. drums from bottling plants work well also (photo 2).

Just remember you need a way to get the water in and out easily. An open container like the cattle trough works great if you just want to water nearby using watering cans because the surface is open making it easy to dunk the can. If you have an open container don't forget to use mosquito control. The mosquito dunks work well.

If your tank is elevated, you can use gravity feed to water your plants by drilling a hole in the bottom of the tank and hooking up a hose to it. Another way of watering is using a fountain pump that delivers anywhere from 200 to 350 gal. per hour, a very good system. (photo 3).



Photo 3

You get just enough pressure and flow that it does not knock the soil out of the pot or take so long that you wish you were done. The fountain pumps can be found at any hardware store or nursery that sells pond equipment.

If you are going to be building a new house or any structure that requires digging, consider digging a hole for a water cistern. Depending on the size of the structure you can bury a cistern