



# Setting-Up a Rain Barrel

Fact Sheet # ACFFL 1781

Clem, T. & Hudson, A.

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## Introduction

The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program's eight principle, "Reduce Stormwater Runoff" highlights the importance of controlling stormwater in our landscapes. Excess stormwater erodes soil; washes away landscape debris; and carry oils, fertilizers, and pesticides into our water bodies.

To help mitigate excess stormwater from entering our waterbodies and to use stormwater wisely within our landscapes, homeowners began installing rain barrels into their landscapes. Rain Barrels provide opportunities for homeowners to capture and store stormwater for beneficial use in the landscape. A rain barrel is a commonly used in homes to store water for irrigating our landscape's ornamental plants.

This document will serve as a guide to setting-up rain barrels on your property. If you would like information about building a rain barrel, please see ACFFL 1781 *Creating a Rain Barrel for Water Conservation*.

## Select a Location

To identify a location for your rain barrel, note where excess water falls from the roof of your home. Two possible locations include an existing gutter downspout or the "V" of a roof where water accumulates and falls to the ground (Figure 1).

The location you choose should be able to fill-up the rain barrel rather quickly during a rain event. It is also important to identify a location where excess water that overflows from the rain barrel could be dispersed within the landscape (ie landscape or shrubs beds).



**Figure 1:** A downspout is modified to drain into a rain barrel rather than to the landscape. A simple modification that can easily be completed without much experience or skill. .

## Prepare Site

A solid foundation for the rain barrel is important to its success. Before putting the rain barrel in place, we recommend placing angular (not smooth or round) stone or rock to help create a sturdier base to support the rain barrel. To create a sturdier base, you may also put pavers atop the gravel-which will ensure a level surface.

It is highly recommended to raise your rain barrel. This will ensure a greater water flow, but also allow you to place a bucket under the water spigot. Stacking several concrete block on top of your prepared site will help provide enough support and height. Many homeowners will build or assemble permanent structures to support and hold their rain barrels.



**Figure 2:** A rain barrel is placed upon stacked blocks to help increase flow rate from the barrel and increase accessibility to the spigot.

### Overflow

Expect overflow from top of barrel. To manage overflow, attach a hose to small hose attachment on side of barrel. You may run the hose to an existing flowerbed, into your turfgrass area, or into a rain garden.

There are many other possibilities for managing overflow from your rain barrel. Most rain barrels can be easily modified for overflow water to be directed back into their gutter system or larger overflow pipes can be connected to move a larger flow of water to other parts of the landscape. Other creative solutions for managing overflow is to install bioswales and rain gardens to help convey and collect excess stormwater.

To learn more about designing bioswales and rain gardens visit the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program webpage or contact Alachua County's Master Gardener Help Desk.

### Maintenance

Overtime, excess water overflow may cause soil to erode. It is important to check for soil erosion to prevent the rain barrel from tipping over.

A wire mesh is atop the rain barrel to help prevent mosquitoes from entering the barrel (Figure 3). If you think mosquitoes are breeding

in the barrel you may put in Mosquito Dunks, which contains Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), a natural mosquito pesticide. Bt kills mosquito larvae, but is harmless to birds, fish, wildlife, and pets.

Dirt will collect inside the barrel over time and can lead to a bitter smell. To eliminate the smell, drain the barrel and rinse the inside with a vinegar-water mixture. After completing, allow the barrel to sit overnight before allowing to fill-up with more water.



**Figure 3:** A fine wire mesh atop the rain barrel helps prevent mosquitoes from inhabiting the stored water.

### Painting the Barrel

Painting rain barrels are great opportunities to involve friends, family, and children. Reach out to UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County for more information on painting your rain barrel (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** A painted rain barrel adds fun color and personality to any landscape.