

YEAR-ROUND GARDENING

HARVESTING RAINWATER

Eileen Tully, Colorado Master Gardener

Water is a precious resource in Colorado. Even when reservoirs are full, the next drought could be right around the corner. Lawn and garden watering make up almost 40% of all household water used during the summer. As gardeners, we've learned that every drop of water counts.

With the passing of House Bill 16-1005 in May 2016, it's now legal in Colorado to collect and use rainwater in home gardens. It's called rainwater harvesting.

The official definition goes like this: rainwater harvesting is the process of intercepting storm water runoff and putting it to beneficial use. Rainwater is collected in containers such as rain barrels, pools, cisterns, or tanks. For the rest of this article I'll use the term 'rain barrel.'

A rain barrel will save an average homeowner about 1,300 gallons of water during the peak summer months. Rainwater harvesting provides free water that contains no chlorine, lime, or calcium, making it ideal for gardens, lawns, and car/ window/dog washing. Rainwater saves money by decreasing the demand for treated tap water.

How it works --

Water is diverted from gutters and downspouts to connected storage tanks that collect the rainwater. These containers can be made almost any material, including plastics, metals, concrete, masonry, stone, and wood. The barrel has spigot attached near the base to remove the water for use.

That's the basics. However, the first several gallons will probably contain impurities such as dust and bird droppings. First-flush diverters, using simple technology, will prevent the initial flow of rainwater from draining into the rain barrel. One example is a



ball that floats with the rising water to close off an opening after an inflow of 5 gallons. After that, water is diverted to a pipe leading to the rain barrel.

According to Colorado law, all containers must have a lid to block access for mosquitoes to breed. The lid will also help reduce evaporation. If you decide to make your own container be sure that the container is childproofed with a secure lid.

To prevent overflow, two barrels can be joined together or fitted with an overflow hose. To comply with the law, no more than two rain barrels can be installed at a single-family household. To make it easier to release the water from the barrel, insert a tap at the bottom of the barrel where a hose can be attached.

In Colorado rainwater quality is considered good; however, rain barrel water cannot be used for drinking. The rain barrel should be completely emptied every month.

The good news is that with rainwater harvesting, you can continue to water your lawn and garden even during times of water rationing.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by calling a Master Gardener Volunteer at 520-7684 or emailing CSUmg2@elpasoco.com. Volunteers are available to help you Monday to Thursday from 9 to 12. For current garden tips visit

<https://www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC>. For current classes visit

<http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/>.

Vegetable gardening Seminar- Saturday April 29, 9am - 3:30 pm. \$40

Whether you are new to vegetable gardening or an experienced gardener looking for new tricks, we will have something for everyone!

Harvesting Rainwater, Make and Take a Rain Barrel- Tuesday, May 16, 6-8 pm. \$60

Learn about the particulars of the new law and build a rain barrel to take home.

Registration closes May 5.

Fill, Thrill, Spill Floral Container Gardening - Thursday, May 18, 6:30 – 8 pm. \$30

Learn techniques to create and maintain sun/shade planters then take home a potful of plants that will bloom all summer.

Strawberries Make & Take a Planted Strawberry Container – Thursday, Jun 1, 6:30-8 pm \$35

Strawberries are easy to grow in a container and multiply quickly. Plant and take them home!

Sustainable Succulents: Make & Take a Planted Container – Saturday, June 10, 9-10:30am \$30

Learn about low water, cold hardy perennial succulents. Create an amazing planter.

Herbs: Make and Take Container Herb Garden June 17, 9:00 am -10:30 am - \$30

Learn to grow your own kitchen herb garden and save!

Registration is required for all classes. Register online at EPCExtension.eventbrite.com, or call 719-520-7690.