

Rain Barrel Art: a beautiful step toward cleaner rivers



*Photo: Delaware
Department of
Natural Resources &
Environmental
Control*

Mystic River watershed Urban Waters program

What is a rain barrel?

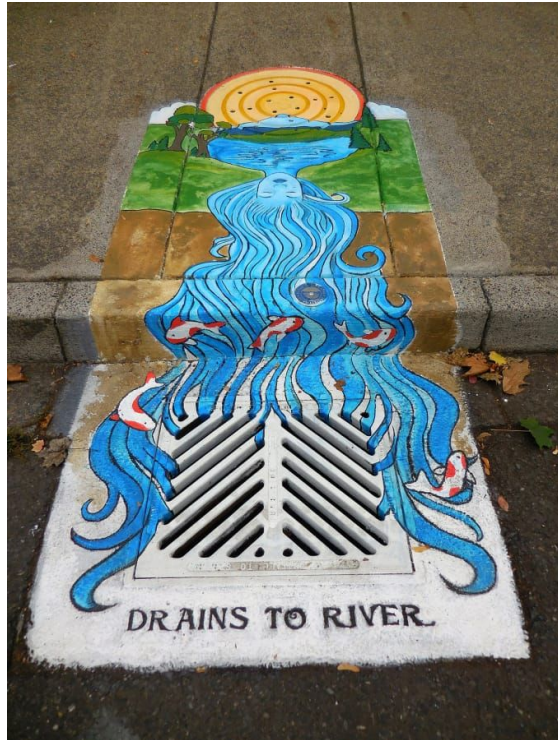
Rain barrels are just as they sound: they're large barrels that catch the rain.

Most people connect the barrels to the downspouts from their gutters to efficiently collect all of the rain from their roof. It's possible to just leave a rain barrel open to catch the rain that falls directly into it, but it will fill much more slowly that way.

Photo: Grid Magazine, Philadelphia



Why use a rain barrel? -- capturing stormwater



- In most cases, stormwater from your gutters flows out onto sidewalks and street and runs off directly into storm drains.
- Stormwater runoff can pick up pollutants like fertilizer and dog waste from hard surfaces and conveys it directly to local rivers, lakes, ponds, and streams.
- When it rains, runoff from hard surfaces: roofs, sidewalks, driveways and roads flows quickly into the stormwater system, and floods can occur.
- So, keeping stormwater runoff from your property out of the stormwater system with a rain barrel keeps local water bodies cleaner, and can help reduce flooding in your neighborhood.

Photo: Vancouver Watersheds Alliance

Why use a rain barrel? -- saving water

- As much as 30% of household water consumption in the US goes toward gardens and lawns.
- But it's really not necessary to use treated drinking water on your plants!
- Once it's captured in a rain barrel, rain water can be used to water your garden, reducing your need for city water for this purpose.

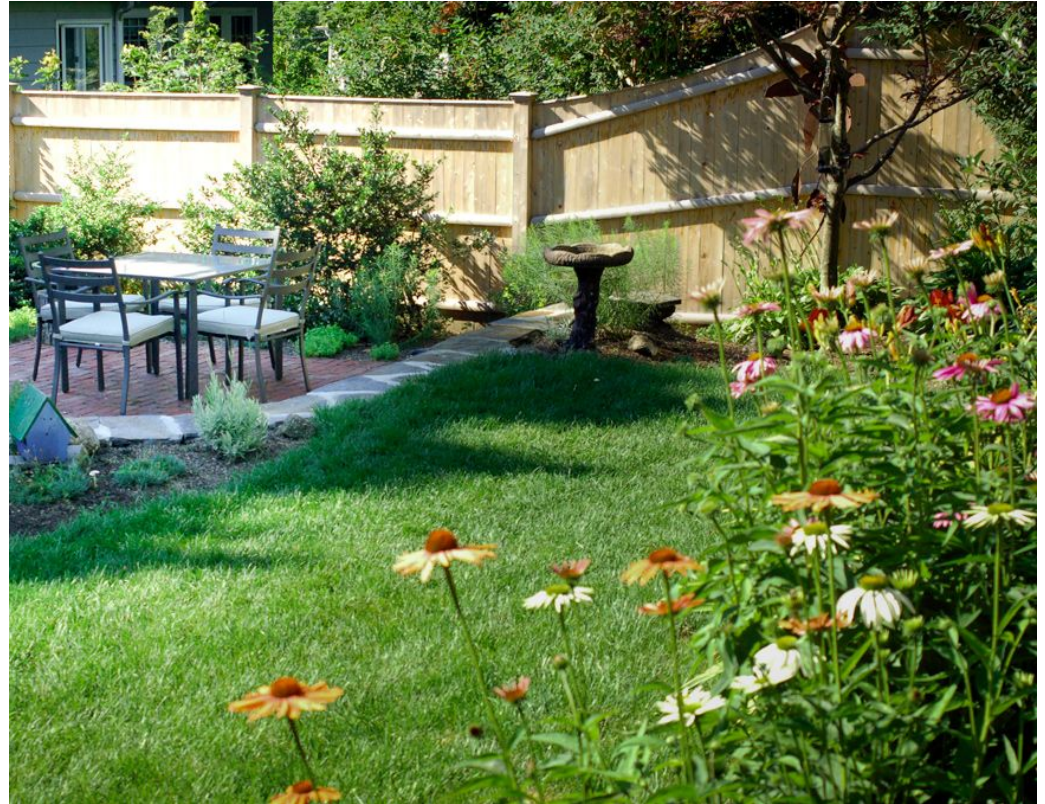


Photo: Yard and a Half Landscaping, Waltham, MA

Why paint a rain barrel?



- A neutral-colored rain barrel is meant to blend in with your house and yard -- but a painted barrel makes a statement.
- Art often features the places and creatures that benefit from cleaner water -- like the ducks and fish shown here. Use your rain barrel art as an opportunity to teach others about stormwater!
- Drawing attention to your rain barrel might inspire your neighbors to get one of their own.

Photo: Cuyahoga soil and water conservation district

How do I get a rain barrel?

- Many cities and towns in the Boston areas offer rain barrels for purchase at a discount through their Department of Public Works, Environment office, or another municipal department. Most partner with The Great American Rain Barrel Company, based in Hyde Park.
- The barrels not only help you save water and reduce flooding -- the barrels themselves are up-cycled shipping drums, originally used to import food products such as olives.
- In some communities, rain barrels are available at a one-day event. In others, they can be ordered throughout the season. This year, due to Covid-19, many rain barrel events have been cancelled or postponed, though some communities are still offering rain barrels to residents later this summer. Find the info about your city or town at greatamericanrainbarrel.com under “shop community programs.”
- Is your town’s program on hiatus this year? Not to worry! -- you can still purchase directly from Great American Rain Barrel through their All Towns Safe Distribution in Hyde Park.



How do I paint a rain barrel?



Photo: Onondaga County Save the Rain

If barrels are at all dirty or dusty, the outside will need to be cleaned before priming. Soapy water and a rinse will help remove grime, or wipe down with rubbing alcohol for a deeper clean.

Apply a plastic primer (such as Krylon Fusion or Rust-Oleum plastic spray paints) before applying acrylic paint. Primer or regular will work. Two cans are needed to coat a barrel.

Before applying acrylic paint gently buff the primer paint with sandpaper to remove any gloss.

After the acrylic paint is applied, provide at least 48 hours of drying time before applying top coat (such as Krylon Fusion UV protectant spray or Rust-Oleum clear crystal) to seal the acrylic paint.

Adapted from Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District: fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/rain-barrels-how-to-paint

Inspired? Want to do even more?

- Connect two or three rain barrels to collect even more water. More barrels = a larger canvas for painting!
- If your city or town doesn't already do an annual rain barrel distribution, contact them and suggest it!
- Encourage friends and neighbors to use rain barrels too -- art optional.
- Do you have an idea for bringing more rain barrel art into our community? Contact darya@groundworksomerville.org -- it would be great to hear from you.



Photo: Great Swamp Watershed Association, Morristown, NJ