

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR RAIN BARREL

WHAT ARE RAIN BARRELS?

Rain barrels collect rainwater from your roof downspouts for non-potable reuse. Rain barrels come in a variety of sizes, but a 55-gallon container is the most common size. Rain barrels can be added to any building with gutters and downspouts, but are most common on single family homes and townhomes.

WHY ARE RAIN BARRELS IMPORTANT?

Rain barrels are a low cost stormwater management practice that provides the following benefits:

- Helps reduce street flooding.
- Improves the health of local waterways by reducing stormwater runoff from your property.
- Conserves water resources by providing an alternative source of water for outdoor (non-potable) use.

Why is it important to maintain your rain barrel?

An unmaintained rain barrel may:

- Overflow and cause erosion near the foundation.
- Become clogged and not allow rainwater to pass into or out of the rain barrel.
- Become a breeding place for insects or tip over.
- Cause ice dams in the winter if not disconnected.
- Become damaged or break.

By maintaining your rain barrel, you are doing your part to help protect your local streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Accordingly, maintaining your rain barrel may be required by your municipality and your local VSMP (Virginia Stormwater Management Program) Authority.

GOOD TO DO...

Regularly

- ☑ Regularly use water collected in your rain barrel between rain events to make sure there is room to collect rainwater during the next storm.
- ☑ Remove leaves and other debris from the screen at the top of the barrel.
- ☑ Ensure your overflow hose is directed to drain away from your foundation and towards a grassy, permeable surface.

Seasonally

- ☑ Unless the rain barrel is made of a material specifically designed for freezing temperatures, disconnect it during the winter to avoid damage. Around Thanksgiving, disconnect the rain barrel from your downspouts, empty the barrel, wash out the barrel, and store it upside down in a protected location.



- ☑ Reconnect the rain barrel after the threat of freezing temperatures has passed – typically some time during the month of April in the Hampton Roads region.
- ☑ Clean out downspouts and roof gutters for the most effective mosquito control.

As Needed

- ☑ Check the entire system (e.g., gutters, debris filter, overflow pipe, fittings, spigot, etc.) to ensure the barrel is functioning properly.
- ☑ Place gutter guards and/or screens on top of roof downspouts and on top of the barrel to prevent leaves and sediment from entering the rain barrel.
- ☑ Remove leaves and other debris from the overflow pipe and the roof gutters.
- ☑ If your barrel has a filter screen, make sure it is intact without holes and securely fastened to keep out mosquitoes.
- ☑ If you expect to be away from your home for an extended period of time and do not have an overflow hose, leave the rain barrel spigot open to prevent overflow.

You can prolong the life of your rain barrel and save money on maintenance costs by regularly inspecting and maintaining the rain barrel to ensure it is functioning properly.

DON'T...

- ❌ Don't leave water in your rain barrel for long periods of time.
- ❌ Don't drink the water in your rain barrel or use the water inside your home or for your pets. This water should only be used as non-potable water.
- ❌ Don't let kids play in or around rain barrels.
- ❌ Don't forget to reconnect your rain barrel every year after the last frost has passed.
- ❌ Don't spray the water directly on vegetables or leaves, as it may contain bacteria from the roof.
- ❌ Don't let the barrel foundation become unlevelled or unstable. A full 55-gallon barrel weighs 450 pounds and can tip over on an unstable surface.

CAN I REMOVE THE PRACTICE?

If your rain barrel was installed as a condition of development, it cannot be removed. It is best to contact your local Planning office or your local Virginia Stormwater Management Program (VSMP) to discuss options before making any changes to your rain barrel.



TROUBLESHOOTING	SYMPTOM	POSSIBLE CAUSE	SOLUTION
	Rain barrel is overflowing	Rain barrel was full before rain event or is too small for roof area.	Empty the rain barrel between storm events. If more than one barrel is needed for your roof area, install additional barrels in a series.
	Cracks or damage	The rain barrel contained water and temperatures dropped below freezing.	Make sure you empty your rain barrel prior to winter. Repair damage as needed.
	Forgetting to drain barrel before a storm	Rain events may occur frequently	Connect a soaker hose to the outlet spigot to direct the slow release of water to your garden or yard area.
	Rain barrel is leaning	Foundation has shifted	Level the foundation and barrel.

RECOMMENDED TIMEFRAMES FOR TYPICAL MAINTENANCE

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
LEAF & DEBRIS REMOVAL				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
WATER DRAINAGE				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
MONITORING				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SEASONAL PREPARATION				✓							✓	

WHAT IF I NEED HELP OR HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

Your municipality or local VSMP (Virginia Stormwater Management Program) Authority can answer your questions and provide additional guidance about maintaining your stormwater facility.

No matter where you are in Hampton Roads, askHRgreen.org can assist you in connecting with the stormwater professionals in your locality. For assistance, please email us at hrgreen@hrpdcva.gov, call (757) 420-8300, or visit us online at askHRgreen.org/WaterQuality.

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