

## Put rain to work with these DIY home and garden improvements Reduce water costs and stormwater pollution at the same time

(Hampton Roads, Va., March 15, 2024) – April showers bring May flowers—making the weeks ahead an ideal time to get a jump on the spring growing season. An easy, affordable way to put nature’s watery bounty to work is by installing a rain barrel on your property. This home improvement will collect and store rainwater for outdoor watering needs—reducing water costs and runoff pollution at the same time.

“When attached to a downspout, rain barrels prevent rainwater from entering the storm drain, storing it for later use on lawns, gardens and plants,” said Rebekah Eastep, a team leader with the [askHRgreen.org](https://askhrgreen.org) region-wide public awareness and education initiative. “This alone makes rain barrels a valuable use of ‘free water.’ But by averting polluted runoff from the yard, a rain barrel helps to keep soil erosion and flooding at bay, too.”

Rainwater flows along rooftops, driveways, and sidewalks, picking up dirt, trash, motor oil, fertilizers, pet waste and other pollutants. The debris washes into the storm drain system, then out to local creeks, rivers and Chesapeake Bay.

You can find ready-to-install rain barrels in local hardware, home and garden and do-it-yourself stores across Hampton Roads. Or, for less than \$100, you can make one by installing a hose bib to a heavy-duty trash can using a drill, screws and nylon screening. (See directions below).

Another option is to snag a spot in one of the popular **askHRgreen.org rain barrel workshops**, held throughout the region. Attendees pay \$25 for a rain barrel they assemble during the workshop and then install at home. These low-cost workshops are made possible by grants from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the sale of Virginia Chesapeake Bay license plates. Look for workshop announcements by following the [askHRgreen.org](https://askhrgreen.org/blog/) blog at <https://askhrgreen.org/blog/>.



*Rain barrels avert polluted water runoff from the yard, helping to keep soil erosion and flooding at bay.*

## Tips for reducing stormwater pollution

Beyond rain barrels, here are more ways to reduce stormwater pollution:

- **Test your lawn soil before adding lawn fertilizer.** Over fertilizing can result in runoff of chemicals into local waterways. Test the soil first, with a do-it-yourself kit available at home and garden stores or from the Virginia Cooperative Extension. The results will help you decide how much fertilizer to apply to achieve a healthy lawn.
- **Leave grass clippings on the lawn.** You can avoid using fertilizer altogether by mulching grass clippings back into the yard, providing a free, natural source of nitrogen.
- **Seed bare spots.** Bald spots in the yard may cause you to lose topsoil when it rains. If these are in shady areas, consider replacing grass with shade-loving groundcovers and plants.
- **Choose more plants/less lawn.** Trees, shrubs and perennials will help reduce the negative effects of stormwater runoff better than a lawn. When possible, choose native plants, which can be drought-tolerant, disease-resistant and will attract important insects, birds and wildlife to your yard. For inspiration, check the Native Plants for Southeastern Virginia Guide, published by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program.
- **Mulch bedding areas.** Mulch helps to control erosion, retain moisture, stabilize the soil temperature and prevent weeds. Leaves are a natural source of mulch that you can keep out of the storm drain by putting them in plant bedding areas.
- **For those who live on the water, create a wide plant buffer between your home and the shoreline.** This will intercept sediments and filter out pollutants that run off the land.
- **Use downspout extensions.** To address standing water around a home's foundation, consider installing downspout extensions. Extending the downspout allows you to aim the flow of rainwater away from the foundation and other paved areas. Direct the flow towards lawn or garden areas instead so rainwater can safely soak into the ground.

"Being conscientious about managing stormwater will help keep pollutants out of the rain's path," Eastep said. "Not only will it improve your property, but it will also improve the health of our local waterways and the ecosystems that depend on them."

For more tips on working smarter in your yard, visit [askhrgreen.org/lawn-garden-best-practices/](https://askhrgreen.org/lawn-garden-best-practices/).

## Low-cost rain barrel workshops from askHRgreen.org

Volunteers with askhrgreen.org will host rain barrel workshops at locations throughout Hampton Roads in March and April. Attendees pay only \$25 for the rain barrel to assemble during the

workshop and install at home. Look for workshop announcements by following the askHRgreen.org blog at <https://askhrgreen.org/blog/>.

### **Build your own rain barrel with these instructions**

Total construction time averages 10 to 15 minutes, and the cost is approximately \$45 depending on the size of the trash can purchased.

#### **Parts you will need:**

- 1 – Heavy duty trash can
- 1 – ½” Hose bib, 1 – 6” Chimney pipe trim collar
- 2 – ½” Faucet tailpipe nuts
- 2 – #15 O-rings, 1 – ½” Threaded nipple
- 1 – ½” Threaded PVC extender
- 4 – Small screws
- 1 – piece 7”x 7” nylon screen

#### **Tools:**

- Drill w/ screw tip
- ¾” paddle drill bit
- Tin Snips or Jig Saw

#### **Directions:**

- Drill ¾” hole approximately 3” to 4” from bottom of barrel.
- Drill ¾” hole near top of barrel.
- Screw ½” threaded nipple into hose bib and insert into bottom hole.
- Slide O-ring over threaded nipple from inside of barrel and screw on faucet tailpipe nut until secure.
- Insert ½” threaded PVC extender into upper hole.
- Slide O-ring onto threaded end from inside and secure with faucet tailpipe nut.
- Cut a 5” hole in trash can lid using tin snips or jigsaw.
- Trim nylon screening to fit chimney pipe trim collar.
- Place screen, then trim cover over hole in lid and attach with screws.
- Trim downspout where rain barrel will be installed to fit the height of your new rain barrel. Direct the downspout to drain into the chimney collar.
- Place the rain barrel on two concrete blocks to provide a level surface.
- Wait for rain!

**About askHRgreen.org** [askhrgreen.org](https://askhrgreen.org) is your go-to resource for all things green in Hampton Roads – from recycling tips and pointers for keeping local waterways clean to water-saving

ideas and simple steps to make local living easy on the environment. Launched in 2011, the region-wide public awareness and education campaign is administered through the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and powered by the following members: The cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield; and HRSD. Like [askHRgreen.org](http://askHRgreen.org) on [Facebook](#), follow on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), tune in to [YouTube](#) and catch the “Let’s Talk Green” [blog](#), written by a team of local experts.

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