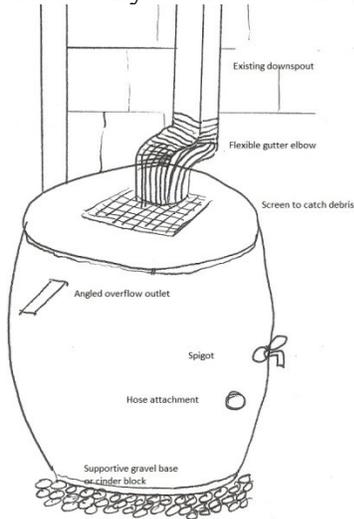


## In times of Drought - The Rain Barrel Strategy for Home Gardeners

Gardeners for centuries from Mediterranean climates have long used the rain barrel as a conservation method for storing roof run-off water for later use. A rain barrel collects water directly from a roof downspout. When every drop counts rainwater harvesting can be a simple way for a home gardener to reduce water consumption from a piped in supply.

Rain barrel devices are available from many sources. If purchasing one for the first time consider several factors. Make sure there is a screening device to keep debris and insects from entering the barrel from the roof. Is there any easy attachment for your hose or a spigot to fill your watering can? Is there an overflow device, and is there a possibility of linkage to a second barrel? If there are small children present is the top opening smaller than they are? Many rain barrel set ups available commercially require an adaptation or fitting to the downspout.

Equipment needed would be a hack saw and safety glasses. Demo instructions are usually available at the product website or on u-tube.



Consider roof composition if you plan to apply roof run-off collected water directly on your vegetable garden. Roof run off may contain lead (Pb), zinc (Zn) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's), especially from the first run-off barrel collected after a long dry spell. ([njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1218/](http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1218/)) A suggestion would be to use the first rain barrel of collected water on the floral garden. Samples analyzed in a New Jersey study from asphalt roofs yielded a low percentage of these contaminants in most roofs. (Rutgers, NJ <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1218/>) For use on vegetable gardens best practices from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) suggest cleaning the rain barrel with a 3% solution of bleach to prevent E coli contamination. Best practices also suggest adding one ounce of 5 to 6% bleach solution to a 55 gallon drum to eliminate any chance of e coli from growing on a monthly basis. (1/8 teaspoon per gallon) Waiting 24 hours before use allows the hypochlorite to degrade into a harmless salt. A Rutgers study recommends that harvested water should be applied only to the soil and not directly on the vegetable plants. If your roof is made from wood shakes that have been treated with any chemical to prevent lichen, moss, algae, etc.

do not use roof run-off water on your plants, or if you have a copper roof or copper gutters or zinc strips.

Let it rain!

by Lynda Alvarez- University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Calaveras County