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How to: Make a rain barrel

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WRITING FOR LINK

Laura Garrett is having a party.

She's already done the shopping and has all the supplies she needs. All she has to do now is set the date and invite her friends.

But she needs to do it soon because it's springtime and rainy days are coming.

No, it's not that Garrett is having an outdoor party. The Upstate Forever Mountain Streams and Rural Waters Project Associate is having a rain barrel making party, and she and her guests are missing out on some very useful rain.

Rain barrel construction may not be a popular theme for parties yet, but as green lifestyles become more expected, you may be getting your invitation in your inbox soon.

So, before you get that e-mail here's a little background on rain barrels and a little how-to if you feel like throwing a party of your own.

Rain barrels are bins that collect rainwater from a gutter or downspout off a house or building. The water collected in the barrel is then used to water grass and plants. Not only do they curb the amount of water you use, but they can save homeowners money when it comes to their water bill.

"I decided if you're going to go do the legwork for yourself, it's not that much harder to just go and buy the pieces for six or seven or eight rain barrels and then get everybody together and make them together," Garrett says.

Plus Garrett, who says she's not that handy will have chance to, as she puts it, "capitalize on everybody's expertise."

You can buy rain barrels from stores like Whole Foods, but Garrett says it's more inexpensive to make it a DIY project. Her research shows that it cost about \$20-\$30 for the supplies to make one, and a readymade barrel can cost you more than \$100.

They're not simple to make but if you can cut out a few hours on the weekend to and get some friends over you can have a reason to party and help Mother Nature.

Supplies:

- 55-gallon barrel (Garrett had a local car wash donate barrels for her party, but they can also be purchased from Dependable Drum in Taylors)
- 1/2- inch cooper-threaded spigot or shutoff valve
- 1/2-inch PVC bulkhead fitting
- Atrium grate
- Mesh screen
- 1 1/4 -inch PVC barbed fitting with male end

- 5-foot section of sump pump hose
- 1 ½-inch hose clamp
- 2 cement blocks

Tools:

- Jigsaw
- Screwdriver
- Marker
- Drill with a ¼ -inch bit and a ½-inch bit
- Channel lock pliers with long handle

Garrett says she found most of the supplies at Lowe's except for the PVC bulkhead fitting which can be found at plumbing supply stores or ordered online.

Step 1. Use the atrium grate to trace a hole on the top of the barrel. Cut the hole for the grate using a jig saw.

Step 2. The shutoff valve will go on the outside of the barrel and the bulkhead fitting will go on the other side of the valve on the inside of the barrel. Determine the location of the drain shutoff valve (the lower the shutoff valve can go the more room there will be for water and the stronger the water pressure will be). See how far down you can place the bulkhead fitting, try using the channel lock pliers to get it as low as possible. Hold the bulkhead fitting in place on the inside of the barrel against the hole where you will place the valve. Once you figure out where the hole for the valve and fitting will be, drill a 1 ¼ inch hole in the barrel.

Step 3. This is where having your friends over helps. You'll need a buddy to hold the bulkhead fitting inside the barrel (with the channel lock pliers) against the hole while you start threading ("twisting in") the valve into the bulkhead. Your friend can let go once you have it partially threaded. Before you start threading make sure the rubber washer is on the inside the barrel and the nylon washer and nuts are on the outside.

Step 4. Place the barrel on its side and position yourself over the barrel and the valve/bulkhead fitting. Thread the bulkhead fitting through the barrel by twisting the valve/bulkhead fitting. As you thread it, the valve and bulkhead fitting should become tighter allowing the bulkhead to thread through the barrel. Continue to tighten the bulkhead fitting and valve together as you thread the fitting through the barrel until the rubber gasket is on against the barrel's inside wall. Once that's in place, tighten the valve until it's tight and face down. Screw down the fitting lock nut on the outside of the barrel.

Step 5. The overflow drain will go below the lowest point of the atrium grate (so that the water level isn't high enough to have exposed water where mosquitoes breed). Figure out where it will go and drill a hole and thread in the 1 ½ inch PVC fitting. Attach the sump hose with a hose clamp.

Step 6. Cut out the mesh screen in order to place it around the atrium grate. Place the grate and the screen in the barrel.

Step 7. Put the barrel in a location near a roof downspout. Place it on top of the cement blocks in order to make it easier to access the valve.

Step 8. Cut gutter at a point where it can be directed into the grate. If you have trouble getting the downspout water into the barrel, you can purchase a flexible gutter extension.

Source: Laura Garrett picked up these instructions from a conference in Nashville.
