



GREEN HOME AND GARDEN TIP #5

BY GREEN HOME AND GARDEN COMMITTEE,
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Rain, Rain, go away, come again some other day. You may have been muttering this little rhyme under your breath during this wet summer. Did you ever stop to think that by capturing the rain as it falls, you really can bring it back another day? How, you ask? Rainwater harvesting can be a very simple system of collecting the water off your roof for watering plants, or a complex system where you can actually collect enough water for household use, including drinking water and a pumping facility. This GH&G tip will focus on a simple system for watering outdoor plants and flower beds.

If you already have gutters on your house, then you've already completed the hardest and most expensive part. Now all you need is a container to collect and store the water in. A collection container can be made out of anything that doesn't leak, from a big plastic garbage can to a decorative giant clay pot, to something especially built for rainwater harvesting (you can find these on the internet). Storage containers that are specially-built have spigots at the bottom so you can hook up a hose, a soaker hose, or even a drip hose. They also have a gutter connection and an overflow valve. If you use something not specially designed for rainwater collection you'll have to add these items yourself. But it's not difficult. An overflow valve can be as simple as a hole covered with window screening near the top of the container. Voila! You're in business. Opaque containers work better than translucent ones. This prevents slime and mold from building up. Covers can be as simple as window screening which fits tightly over the opening of the container. The more water-tight the container is, the less you have to worry about mosquitoes. If in doubt, you can always use a mosquito dunk to prevent the rain barrel from becoming a mosquito breeding ground.

For more detailed information including a simple plan for building your own rain barrel, go to www.coastalprairie.org. Then, in the green index pane, scroll down to Resources and click on 'Educational Material.' You'll see a menu of items. Click on 'Rainwater Harvesting.' You'll find several presentations posted there. Most recommended: 'Capturing Nature's Best' – Kniffen, slide #22, which is posted below. This gives a plan for building your own 'trash can' rain barrel and overall this is the best presentation to understand rainwater harvesting. The whole slide show is also posted.

The Texas Master Naturalists is a group of informed volunteers who are interested in learning about and educating others about the area of Texas where we live and with preserving our natural heritage. We are co-sponsored by the Texas Cooperative Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife. For more information about our group, log on to gcmn.tamu.edu or www.coastalprairie.org.

The Green Home and Garden Workshop is an ongoing project co-sponsored by the Gulf Coast chapter and the Coastal Prairie chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. Our mission is to interest and inform people about safe and eco-friendly ways to garden and maintain their homes. We have a workshop event once a year. The next workshop will be held on February 16, 2008.