

# Recycling Water 101

Massachusetts is rich with many water bodies and plentiful rainfall. But as our demand for water increases with growth, and as our infrastructure ages, some of our streams and lakes have become stressed and we are facing water supply shortages. Today, the need to use our water efficiently with minimal amount of waste is critical to the long-term health and viability of these important resources. The water supply shortage is not just a Massachusetts problem, it's a global problem, and the time to act is right now.

## Know the Facts about Fresh Water

To illustrate how important and how limited a resource freshwater is in our world, consider the following. More than 70% of the Earth's surface is covered by water, but only 2.5% of this supply is considered fresh water. The rest is found in the form of salt water in the oceans. Of the fresh water that exists, most is found in glaciers and ice caps. Water can also be found in the form of clouds and humidity in the soil. That leaves us 3/10 of 1% found in the form of lakes, rivers and streams. Unfortunately, much of this small amount of freshwater is in danger of drying up through desertification or becoming so contaminated that it cannot be used for human consumption. Changing our habits of water use can help to slow this growing problem. For more information on world water consumption, [click here](#).

## Harvesting Rainwater: An Old Idea with New Converts

Collecting rainwater for use during dry months in rain barrels or other depositories is an ancient and traditional practice. Records show that rainwater was collected in simple clay containers as far back as 2,000 years ago in Thailand, and in other areas of the world after that. Most likely, you have heard of a Sherborn neighbor who has had a well run dry at some point during a hot summer, or you know of friends in neighboring towns who have restrictions on the days they can water their lawns and gardens because there just isn't enough water to go around. Add to that the rising prices to those homeowners who use municipal water and those businesses we frequent in those municipal-water towns, and the water shortage problem is one that affects everyone. The problem is complicated by the impression that rainwater is a renewable natural resource. This leads to aquifers that are "mined" so that more water is drawn than the aquifer naturally receives to recharge it. As the water crisis mounts, more and more people are seeking ways to minimize impacts on the water supply.

Harvesting water in rain barrels can be part of the solution. Just look outside your window the next time it rains and imagine all the water that's running down the walks and streets that can be put to beneficial use in your home and garden!

## Benefits of Harvesting Rainwater with Rain Barrels

The most obvious reason Sherborn residents should harvest rainwater is to help the environment. Depending on the size of your home and the amount of rainfall, you can collect a substantial amount of rainwater with a simple system. This is most important in a town like Sherborn because using rainwater

conserves the use of the water in your well. Using a rain barrel can conserve 1300 gallons or more of water in peak summer months. Using rainwater combined with the domestic use of grey water can further increase your savings of water resources. An added advantage is that rain barrels also reduce water pollution by reducing the storm water runoff which can contain pollutants like sediment, oil, grease, bacteria and nutrients.

Rainwater stored in rain barrels has many uses. Some people find it mostly useful for watering to improve the health of their landscapes and gardens. Rain is a naturally soft water and devoid of minerals, chlorine, fluoride, and other chemicals. For this reason, plants respond very well to rainwater. Since the rainwater is usually collected from the roofs of houses, it picks up very little contamination when it falls.

You may purchase a rain barrel or make one for yourself. Either way, it is inexpensive. Whether you buy or build it, make sure a rain barrel has a screen, so it is animal and insect resistant. There should be two fittings, one for outflow, and another for overflow protection. Choose a barrel with a dark color to prevent light transmission and inhibit algae growth.

Easy instructions for making your own rain barrel: <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/yard/tools/make-a-rain-barrel-save-water/>

Scan the QR code to visit the [Sherborn Recycling Committee Website](#) for more information:

