



By Barbara Elmore, HCMG

Barreling Through the Dry Times

How easy is it to make your own rainwater collection barrel? Almost as easy as shooting fish in a barrel — with a little bit of guidance and eager volunteers.

Hill Country Master Gardeners have made 124 barrels for both members and others in the community. Multiply that by 55 gallons, the amount each barrel holds, and that's almost 7,000 gallons of water not coming out of the aquifer.

Here's a DIY recipe if you want to try it.

Items you will need:

- 55-gallon food grade poly barrel
- 3/4-inch outdoor hose bib faucet
- Roll of window screen fabric
- Tube of silicone sealer
- 3/4-inch PVC threaded elbow
- 1-gallon black nursery pot

Tools you will need:

- 1-inch paddle drill bit
- Rock wall saw
- Electric drill

Step 1: Clean the container by rinsing with water.

Step 2: Place the gallon nursery pot in the location you designate to catch the water flow from the roof, downspout, rain chain, etc. Trace the pot bottom and cut the hole using your saw. The cutout should be about 6 inches and the pot's lip should fit snugly in the hole. Do not glue the pot to the barrel because you'll need to remove it to clean or replace.

Step 3: Cut a piece of window screen fabric to fit in the bottom of the pot. This will keep debris out of your rainwater.

Step 4: With the paddle drill, make a 1-inch hole for the hose bib or spigot. This hole should be about 4 inches from the bottom of the barrel. Thread the spigot into the hole. Then remove it, cover the thread with silicon sealant, and reinstall. Let dry.

Step 5: Install an overflow vent an inch below the bottom of the nursery pot. Thread the 3/4-inch PVC elbow into the hole. Remove the elbow and place sealant on the threads. Reinstall. Let dry. Make sure the vent faces down instead of up to deter bugs from flying in.

Step 6. Put your barrel under the downspout and wait for the rain. Putting your barrel on cinderblocks or some other platform makes getting the water out easier and allows easier access to make repairs. Elevate it before the rain comes because a 50-gallon barrel of water weighs about 400 pounds.

Note: If you want a multi-barrel system, you can connect them using 3/4-inch PVC pipe and male and female adaptors. Place them so that the water goes into the first barrel, and position the overflow pipes to connect the barrels. For someone who knows how to use tools, building the barrel should take about 45 minutes.

